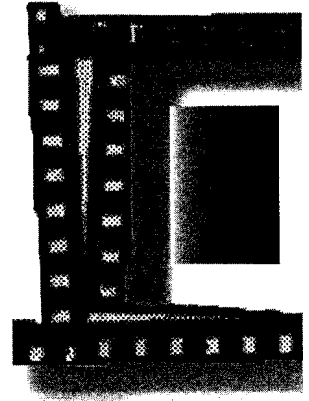


# Anatomy of Film



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**BERNARD F. DICK**

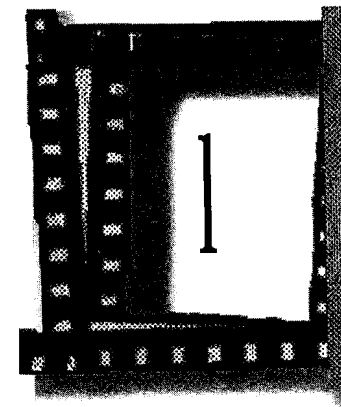
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# Film, Cinema, or Movie



## Understanding the Medium

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**F**iction is a widely understood term; it means the invented, the imaginative, the fanciful—the opposite of fact. There is also *historical fiction*, as well as *historical drama*: terms for works of the imagination that draw on history for narrative or dramatic purposes (Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*, Shakespeare's *Henry V*). Thus, a novel or a play can still be considered fiction, even though it is derived from fact.

There are other forms of fiction as well—gothic, romantic, picaresque, detective, stream-of-consciousness, to name a few. *Fiction*, then, is an umbrella term—one with many different spokes.

*Film* is another word that means different things in different contexts: roll film, film stock, *a film*, *to film*. We were all exposed to some kind of film before we saw our first example of classic moviemaking. It may have been something we saw on television: a cartoon, a Three Stooges

short, a *Lassie* rerun. Or perhaps it was an educational film we saw in school or a theatrical film (a film intended to be shown in movie theaters).

Yet, asked to define *film*, many of us would hesitate. But so would professional filmmakers. Animators, documentary filmmakers, and experimental filmmakers perceive themselves as working in the same medium—film. The films they produce, however, differ totally in look, subject matter, and style from those of mainstream Hollywood. To the general public, *film* means “movie”—a perfectly acceptable term (and one that the noted American critic Pauline Kael has always championed).

Unfortunately, *movie* suggests popular culture rather than art, while *cinema* suggests art rather than popular culture. Ironically, *cinema*, though it is a French word, is derived from the Greek *kinein* (to move); thus, whether we use *cinema* or *movie*, we are talking about an art form that was once known as “moving pictures”—appropriately named because the pictures really moved. There is nothing pejorative about the word *movie*; certainly some of the greatest examples of film art ever produced (many of which are discussed in this text) are, and always will be, movies. Although Kael finds *cinema* pretentious, it is commonly used to categorize films according to kind (contemporary cinema, world cinema) and origins (American cinema, French cinema, Third World cinema, and the like). *Movie*, then, is just a synonym for the narrative film and implies nothing about artistic worth.

Since we are dealing only with the narrative, or story, film, a definition is in order. However, a good definition is also a description. In attempting to define *film*, the American playwright, screenwriter, and critic John Howard Lawson offered this description: “A film is an audiovisual conflict; it embodies time-space relationships; it proceeds from a premise, through a progression, to a climax or ultimate term of the action.”<sup>1</sup> Note that Lawson has not described film as such; he has described one of its particular forms: the narrative film, or what is commonly called a movie.

## NARRATIVE FILM

What is a movie? To Lawson it is narrative, told through sound and image, that builds to a climax and culminates in a resolution. Note that Lawson does not make dialogue part of the definition: he merely says that a movie is audiovisual. A movie does not need spoken dialogue to tell a story. The silent films had no spoken dialogue, but they did have some kind of sound. Piano or organ accompaniment was common, and sound effects were necessary to complement the action on the screen. Even with the advent of sound, filmmakers who were truly creative knew that parts of the action could be told visually without any dialogue.

In a film, the images themselves can tell part of the story, independently of language. Some of the most unforgettable moments in film are wordless. We should not go so far as Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) in Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), who made only silent films and saw no need for spoken dialogue. “We had faces then!” she exclaims. On the other hand, the coming of sound ushered in the golden age of the American film (roughly 1930 to the end of the 1950s), during which a vast number of classic films appeared that were the result of outstanding screenplays. Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* (1941) would never have been the masterpiece it is without the script that Herman J. Mankiewicz and Welles created. Even contemporary filmmakers such as Woody Allen and Joel and Ethan Coen realize the paramount importance of the script. Still, there are moments when words are unnecessary because the visuals are doing the narrating: the burning sled in *Citizen Kane* that reveals the meaning of “Rosebud”; a man, destined to be a loner, standing in the doorway of a house that everyone enters but himself (John Ford’s *The Searchers*, 1956); an astronaut clearing the window of his spaceship at the same time that his wife is looking out of the window of their home so that it seems as if they see each other—if only in their imagination (*Apollo 13*, 1995). The great filmmakers always knew that the difference between theater and film was the difference between a play and a screenplay; the latter is precisely what the term implies: a play designed for the screen, where images can carry as much weight as words.

Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *All About Eve* (1950) and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) illustrate the way images advance or enhance the action without the use of dialogue. *All About Eve* is the story of an aspiring actress, Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter), who deceives the Broadway star Margo Channing (Bette Davis) into befriending her. After she betrays Margo and becomes a star herself, Eve becomes the victim of a similar scheme: Phoebe, a star-struck student, will do to Eve what Eve did to Margo. As Phoebe stands in front of a three-way mirror, bowing to an imaginary audience as if she were accepting an award, her image is multiplied until the screen is filled with what seems to be an infinity of Phobes. The final sequence is entirely without dialogue. None is needed; the visuals themselves make the point. As long as there are stars, there will be the star-struck, some of whom will stop at nothing to achieve fame.

*Psycho* will always be remembered for the shower murder of Marion Crane (Janet Leigh). The episode is completely wordless. There is sound, of course: music that really shrieks, as if anticipating the audience’s reaction. As Marion prepares for a shower in her room at the Bates Motel, Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) is in the adjacent parlor, where there’s a peephole, covered by a picture of Susanna and the Elders. Removing the



Bette Davis (left) as Margo Channing; Marilyn Monroe as an aspiring actress; and George Sanders as a formidable critic in *All About Eve* (1950). (Courtesy Twentieth Century-Fox)

picture, Norman watches Marion undress. She goes into the shower, luxuriating in the spray of water. Suddenly a shadow, presumably of an elderly woman, appears against the shower curtain. The “woman” pulls the curtain aside and proceeds to stab Marion repeatedly as blood mingles with the water and swirls down the drain. Although the entire episode lasts less than a minute, a great deal of information has been imparted. Hitchcock’s choice of painting was not arbitrary; just as the Elders in the Book of Daniel spied on Susanna as she entered her bath, so the voyeuristic Norman spies on Marion. A shower is a place of privacy, relaxation, and cleansing. Marion’s privacy has been invaded. Instead of relaxation, she experiences the repose of death. Instead of her body being cleansed, it is defiled. Actually, it is the shower stall that must be cleansed, because it has been splattered with blood.

Writing down everything that happens in that episode would take longer than it does to see it. In his *Filmguide to Psycho*, James Naremore devotes five pages to a description of those forty-five seconds of film.<sup>2</sup>

## TIME-SPACE RELATIONSHIPS

Like any narrative, a good movie involves conflict: personalities clash, goals differ, interests diverge, characters are at odds with each other or with society. In a movie, however, the conflict is audiovisual: it is heard and seen rather than written and read. A movie “embodies time-space relationships.” While a written narrative can suggest that two events are occurring at the same time and in different places, a movie can do more than suggest: it can *show* them occurring.

In their accounts of the Passion, the four evangelists imply that Peter’s denial of Christ coincided with Christ’s interrogation by the

Sanhedrin: while Peter was outside in the courtyard denying Christ, Christ was within, being questioned by the chief priests and scribes. A film could make it clear that this was the case by switching back and forth from Peter’s denials to the Sanhedrin’s questions. In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (V,1), Romeo buys poison from an apothecary and plans to commit suicide because he has not received a crucial letter. In the next scene, Friar John explains to Friar Laurence that he was unable to deliver the letter because he had been confined to a house that was under quarantine. Both actions—the purchase of the poison and the explanation about the letter—seem to be occurring simultaneously. A film could cut from Romeo’s buying the poison to Friar John’s detention; it could even do so without dialogue if the bottle were labeled poison and the house in which Friar John was confined were depicted as plague-ridden.

## MOVIE TIME

Since a movie tells a story, it must do so within a certain period of time. Anyone who attends movies regularly checks the movie timetable in the newspaper. Television programmers are especially conscious of a movie’s running time, since films are often cut to fit into a particular time slot. Running time, however, is real time—90 minutes, 105 minutes, and so on. Movie time is not; movie time manipulates real time, so that an event can be prolonged or shortened, and an action slowed down or sped up.

Movie time is arbitrary. In a movie, an entire day can be compressed into a few minutes or even seconds; likewise, a few minutes or seconds can be prolonged into what seems to be an entire day. In the famous Odessa steps sequence in *Potemkin* (1925), the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein distorts real time. He makes the massacre seem longer than it was because he wants to emphasize the atrocities the czarist troops committed against the people of Odessa. Toward the end of the sequence, a soldier swings his saber, striking the right eye of a woman wearing a pince-nez. In reality, the soldier would have slashed her eye with one movement of his arm, but Eisenstein fragments the act. First, we see the soldier, his arm raised with the blade behind his head; then we see his savage face, but not the saber; now his face dominates the screen. Next, he shouts something as his raised arm begins to descend. Finally, we see the woman—her mouth gaping, the right lens of her pince-nez shattered, blood spurting from her eye and running down her face.

Removing a key from a key ring is a simple operation. In Alfred Hitchcock’s films, however, nothing is simple. In *Notorious* (1946), Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) is an American intelligence agent whose job requires her to marry Sebastian (Claude Rains), an ex-Nazi. She has keys to every room

in their house except the wine cellar. Since her coworker (Cary Grant) suspects that the cellar contains more than wine, Alicia must remove that key from her husband's key ring while he is in the bathroom getting ready for a party they are giving that evening. To create suspense, Hitchcock prolongs the action, making the audience wonder whether she will succeed; and if she does, what will happen when her husband discovers that the key is missing—which he does when the champagne runs out and he must make a trip to the wine cellar.

In real life, a wine bottle perched too close to the edge of the shelf will simply fall and smash. In *Notorious* a wine bottle does smash, but first it lingers on the edge, causing us to wonder if it will fall; and if it does, what its contents will reveal. In Hitchcock, things are not always what they seem; needless to say, this wine bottle does not contain wine.

The party in *Notorious*, which lasted several hours, occupies about ten minutes of screen time. Similarly, in Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* (1941), a cross-country political campaign occurs in a few seconds. The climax of *Nickelodeon* (1976) is the premiere of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). To make the premiere as credible as possible, clips from the actual film were used. The premiere is so authentic, and the audience's reaction so spontaneous, that we forget that Griffith's three-hour epic has been reduced to a few minutes. Likewise, Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975), which runs two and a half hours, is so absorbing that we forget we have spent five days with twenty-four people, whose destinies have been interconnected.

We must observe the laws of time, but movies do not; they can expand or contract time. If the film engages our attention, as James Whale's *Show Boat* (1936) does, we are oblivious to the fact that a story that spanned three generations took only 113 minutes to tell. A few films exhibit perfect unity of time: the running time coincides with the story time. Such films are, admittedly, rare, but Robert Wise's *The Set-Up* (1949) and Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952) run seventy-two and eighty-four minutes, respectively. Clocks are important markers of time in both films; as a result, we realize that there was no difference between the time it took to see the film and the time it took for the plot to unfold.

We have treated films like *All About Eve*, *Psycho*, and *Notorious* as texts—works to be analyzed and interpreted. A movie is a text, and it is similar to any other text, including a textbook used in a course. *Text* comes from the Latin *textus* (to weave). A text weaves the material together in an orderly and coherent fashion. A movie is a text that interweaves sound in any or all of its aspects (noise, music, speech) and image (everything from the printed word to physical action, movement, gaze, and gesture) for the purpose of telling a story.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Howard Lawson, *Film: The Creative Process* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 292.

<sup>2</sup> James Naremore, *Filmguide to Psycho* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 53-57.

in film: print should be used as a means of supplying information that either cannot be imparted in any other way or that will reduce the amount of exposition. Sometimes the script calls for print. In *Dark Victory* (1939), Judith Traherne (Bette Davis) learns that she is terminally ill when she comes across her medical file and sees the words "PROGNOSIS NEGATIVE." In a similar film, *An Act of Murder* (1948), a woman learns from a letter her physician has written to her husband that she is dying. When Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) realizes that Carl Bernstein's (Dustin Hoffman) apartment is bugged in *All the President's Men* (1976), he turns up the stereo and types: "Deep Throat says our lives may be in danger. SURVEILLANCE. BUGGING."

Since computers are now part of our everyday life, the computer screen has also become an important narrative tool, capable of advancing the plot in the same way the typewriter once did. The computer that the villain in *Ghost* (1990) uses to transfer funds becomes the means of revealing his identity; *The Net* (1995) revolves around an attempt to use computer technology to alter a character's identity.

Film, then, uses print in a variety of ways (signs, plaques, posters, headlines, ticker tape, letters, notices, invitations, telegrams, notes, type-written or computer-generated texts, and so on). Thus, print can perform an important narrative function; as visual shorthand, it minimizes the need for expository dialogue.

## SOUND

Seeing a narrative film without sound would be an abomination. Even the silent films (which were silent only in the sense that there was no spoken dialogue) had some kind of sound effects as well as musical accompaniment. *Nickelodeon* illustrates the importance of sound in the silent film by showing the world premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*, in which men fire cap pistols backstage to simulate the gunfire in the battle scenes.

Gunfire, a staple in westerns, war films, and crime movies, is one of many sound effects used in films. Under the heading of sound effects come all the sounds heard in a film except dialogue, music, and offscreen narration. Noise is an important sound effect in a film, and it can be a legitimate, even powerful, device. Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People* (1942) would not be the horror classic it is if noise were absent in two crucial scenes. As Alice (Jane Randolph) walks home at night, she hears the ominous sound of footsteps. Just when we think that whatever is following her will catch up with her, we hear the sound of brakes; a bus has pulled up alongside Alice, and she quickly boards it. Later, as she is swimming in an indoor pool, she hears growling sounds, as if a ferocious beast were nearby.

The noise in *Cat People* is atmospheric; it is intended to heighten the suspense. In many films, however, noise is essential to the plot. A scene from Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964), for example, demands noise—a noise that the audience and Marnie must hear but that another character in the scene cannot hear. After taking money from her employer's safe, Marnie (Tippi Hedren) stealthily leaves the office. In the adjacent area, a cleaning woman is washing the floors. In order not to be heard, Marnie removes her shoes, placing them in the pockets of her jacket. One of her shoes falls to the floor. Anyone in the vicinity would have heard the sound, yet the cleaning woman does not look up from her work. As we wonder whether Marnie will be discovered, the janitor calls to the cleaning woman in an unnaturally loud voice, making it clear that she is hard of hearing.

*And Now Tomorrow* (1944) contains an interesting example of noise that, under ordinary circumstances would be audible but which, in the context of the film, must be inaudible. When Emily Blair (Loretta Young) wakes one morning, she sees the windowpanes streaked with rain but does not hear the rainfall. The audience discovers that Emily has lost her hearing at the same moment she does: when the rain silently beats upon the window.

## Actual and Commentative Sound

As a form of sound, noise can emanate from a source that is either on or off screen. We do not have to see the source of the noise; we only have to know there is a source. We never see the foghorns in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1962), but we hear them, and know they are coming from nearby ships. In Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), everything in the Finney kitchen shakes when the train passes by. We never see the train, but we hear it and witness the results of the vibrations it causes.

Sound, then, can be actual (or natural) in the sense of coming from a real source that we may or may not see. It can also be commentative in that it may come from a source outside the physical setting of the action. Perhaps the most familiar type of commentative sound is background music, the recurring motifs or signature themes that can identify a character (Lara's theme in *Dr. Zhivago*, 1965), a place (the Tara theme in *Gone with the Wind*, 1939), a physical state (the blindness theme in *Dark Victory*), or an obsession (the power theme in *Citizen Kane*). In *Dark Victory*, when Judith Traherne discovers that she will experience a short period of blindness prior to death, the blindness theme is heard on the soundtrack. Judith cannot hear the music because it is not coming from a source within the action, but the audience hears it and, having heard it before in various forms, recognizes it as a sign of Judith's fate.

## Synchronization and Asynchronization

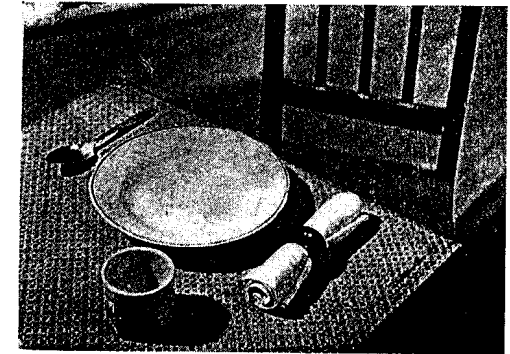
Another way of looking at sound is from the perspective of synchronization and asynchronization. In synchronization, sound and image are properly matched; the sound comes from within the image or from an identifiable source. Synchronization is not just limited to a literal correlation of sound and image. In many films, characters may be in transit (e.g., in a car or a plane) and the audience will see the car on the freeway or the plane in the air but not see the characters. Yet we hear their conversation. In postproduction, the dialogue has been added and synchronized with the image.

There are, however, more sophisticated forms of synchronization. For example, a nonhuman sound may be combined with the image of a person. In *Cat People*, Irena (Simone Simon) tactfully tells her husband on their wedding night that she is not ready to consummate their marriage. As they retire to separate rooms, Irena, who is a descendant of a Serbian cat cult and periodically reverts to panther form, falls to her knees, assuming an animal posture. At that moment, the snarl of a panther is heard. The audience knows the source of the sound: the Central Park Zoo, which Irena frequents. However, within the new context of an unconsummated wedding night, the combination of a sound coming from an identifiable source and the image of the crouching Irena adds another dimension to the narrative: her repressed sexuality is given "voice." While sound and image have been synchronized in this instance, we know the sound source and see the image before us; it now seems as if the image is making the sound. The combination (growling panther + crouching woman) suggests that within Irena there is something waiting to be unleashed.

Synchronization, then, can be quite imaginative. It can be particularly effective when a character remembers the past. The voice of the person remembering can be combined with the image of what is remembered, or the face of the person remembering can be combined with the sound that is remembered. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), Blanche du Bois (Vivien Leigh) periodically recalls the music that was played the night her husband committed suicide. At the end of *Forever Amber* (1947), Amber (Linda Darnell) watches her son go off with his father, never to see either of them again. Earlier, the child's father—Amber's former lover—had said, "May God have mercy on both of us for our sins." In the final scene, Amber, standing at the window, recalls his words—her image synchronized with the sound of his voice.

In synchronization, sound and image are related contextually, spatially, and temporally. In asynchronization, sound and image are related symbolically, metaphorically, or ironically. With the latter, the image the viewer expects to see after hearing a particular sound turns out to be some-

Asynchronization in *M* (1931). When Mrs. Beckmann calls, "Elsie!" the response is not verbal but visual: a place setting never to be used again. (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)



thing quite different. Asynchronization allows filmmakers to contrast sound and image, substitute a sound for an image, or juxtapose sounds and images that would not normally occur at the same time.

In Fritz Lang's *M* (1931), Mrs. Beckmann is waiting anxiously for her daughter Elsie to return from school. She leans out of the window, calling, "Elsie! Elsie!" On the screen we do not see Elsie but rather a series of images: an empty stairwell, an empty attic, Elsie's place at the dinner table, her ball on the grass, and, finally, a balloon that is momentarily caught in some telephone wires and then floats away.

The asynchronization is remarkably subtle. Ironically, Mrs. Beckmann's call is heard, but she is answered only by images that denote absence and emptiness. Elsie will never return. Like the balloon that was caught in the wires and then blown skyward by the wind, she was enticed by a child molester and led away to her death.

## Overlap

What might seem to be asynchronization could be overlap—sound or dialogue that either carries over from one scene to the next or anticipates the new scene by starting at the end of the previous one. Thus, *overlapping sound* is really synchronous, since it emanates from a known source. Bridging scenes through sound was rare in the 1930–1950 period, mainly because such a device would have struck audiences as illogical. If *The Age of Innocence* had been released in 1943 instead of in 1993, there would never have been the scene in which Newland Archer (Daniel Day Lewis) stands in front of a flower shop and, before he even enters, a voice says, "Oh, Mr. Archer. Good evening." The florist would have extended the greeting *after* Archer had entered. Today, however, overlapping sound has become so commonplace that it is just a cue for a scene change.

Still, there are instances in which the scenes being bridged are connected in ways that develop the narrative rather than merely link segments of it together. In Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992), as Malcolm walks along a street thronged with prostitutes, we hear the words "What has happened to our women?" Is this what Malcolm is thinking? The next scene clarifies the situation: the question is part of a sermon that is about to end. The incident in the first scene inspired the subject matter of the sermon in the second, with the question becoming the link between them.

In *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), a CIA official in Washington is asking questions about an agent, who at that moment is hiding out in a Brooklyn Heights apartment. The official's voice carries into the next scene, which takes place in the apartment. The overlapping voice gives us the unsettling impression that the CIA is present everywhere, including Brooklyn Heights.

At the end of *Medium Cool* (1969), set in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic convention, the director, Haskell Wexler, allows the audience to hear about an event before it happens. As a TV cameraperson and an Appalachian schoolteacher are driving away from a bloody confrontation between the police and Vietnam War protesters, a newscaster's voice describes their death in a car crash before it is actually shown. Like the film, the untimely newscast is disturbing; it is not just a matter of overlap but of omniscience. It is as if the "cool medium," as media critic Marshall McLuhan called television, knows our destiny and can therefore compose our obituary before we die.

Filmmakers seeking alternatives to the sound bridge might consider what Robert Zemeckis did in *Forrest Gump*. On a summer night, as Forrest and Jenny (Robin Wright) are sitting together in Alabama, fireworks light up the sky. This is not a fireworks display in an Alabama town, however, but in Liberty Park in Jersey City, New Jersey; and the occasion is the American bicentennial, as we learn from the next scene, a live telecast of the event. Even though these are the Liberty Park fireworks, the transition is not jarring; such a display on July 4 was as common in Alabama as it was anywhere in the country, including Liberty Park.

## Voice-over Narration

Voice-over, off-camera narration or commentary, has been a standard feature of film since the beginning of the sound era and is now so common in film and television that we scarcely notice it. We have become accustomed to the television voices of unseen individuals promoting products, reading labels, or attesting to the miraculous results of a headache remedy. In airports and train stations, we continually hear voices announcing arrivals and departures. We seldom inquire about the source or identity of the

voice because we are usually interested only in the information the voice is conveying. Because disembodied voices are everywhere, we tend to give little thought to voice-over narration in film. It is another case of accepting the familiar uncritically.

Voice-over is also one of the most abused techniques in film. A gifted filmmaker like Woody Allen uses voice-over intelligently; in *Radio Days*, Allen makes voice-over integral to the film, which is a reminiscence by a narrator whose younger self appears as a character. Unfortunately, voice-over can also be a convenience for writers who cannot think of any other way of imparting information. Voice-over is understandable in a memory film like *Radio Days*, but there are other movies that are not reminiscences in which the technique is used without any consistency or logic. In John Ford's *When Willie Comes Marching Home* (1950), the main character's voice keeps intruding even though there is no reason for him to tell his own story.

Historically, when the movies learned to talk, filmmakers seized upon voice-over as a narrative device and attempted to use it as they had used titles. As often happens, the quest for novelty led to eccentricity, and soon voice-over narration was being entrusted to everyone—and everything. *The First Time* (1952), narrated by an unborn baby, dramatizes the disruptions that come with a first child. A variation on the same device occurs in *Look Who's Talking* (1989), which is told from the point of view of a newborn baby (with Bruce Willis providing the voice-over). The film had a certain charm, unlike the 1990 and 1993 sequels, which had little audience appeal, suggesting that once may have been enough.

Since voice-over has become so widespread, its appropriateness deserves assessment. Is it a convention like a soliloquy in a play? Does it function as an expository prologue? Or is it an emergency cord a filmmaker pulls when he or she is unable to think of another way to convey information? There is no manual a filmmaker can consult to determine whether to use voice-over or titles, or to use neither and work the exposition into the dialogue. Sometimes voice-over needs some kind of aural reinforcement: a few sounds, some chords, a musical theme. Sometimes the necessary information can be incorporated into the dialogue so that both voice-over and titles are unnecessary.

The best filmmakers know intuitively when to use voice-over and when to use some kind of title. They also know that in some instances a combination is required. The 1935 adaptation of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, directed by Jack Conway, is a good example of the sensible use of print and voice-over. The novel includes two of the most famous lines in English literature: the opening line ("It was the best of times, it was the worst of times") and the closing line ("It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done: it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have



ever known"). The opening appears as a title without voice-over. This is fitting because these are the words of Dickens, not one of his characters; thus, the text alone is sufficient. At the end, however, voice-over is necessary. The last words of the film, like those of the novel, are the thoughts of Sydney Carton, the main character; they are not Dickens's reflections. Since these are Carton's thoughts, the audience must hear them. Since Carton does not verbalize his thoughts, the audience hears them through voice-over.

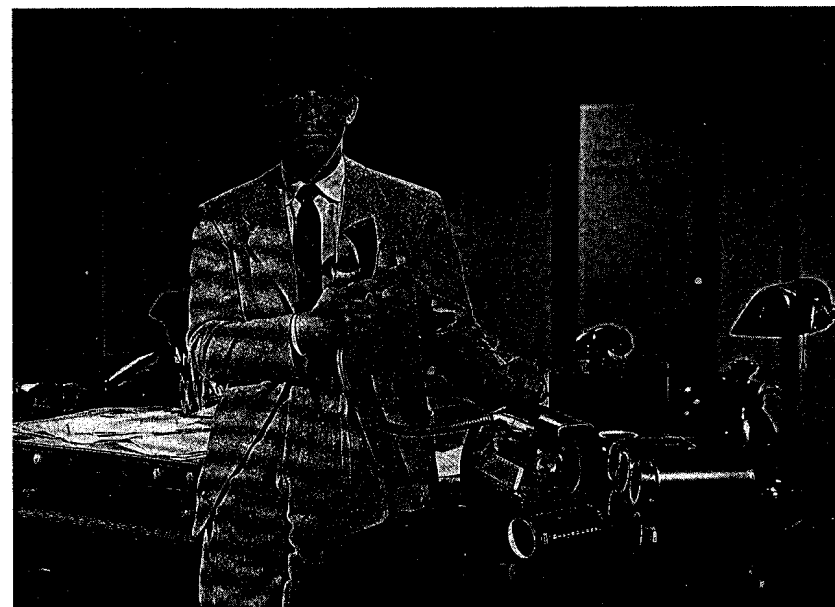
The dominant forms of voice-over are the narrating "I" and the voice of God.

### The Narrating "I"

The narrating "I" tells the story, or a portion of the story, that we see on the screen. There can be one "I" or several. Some films are narrated by one character (*Murder, My Sweet*, 1944); others by multiple narrators (*Citizen Kane*; *Sorry, Wrong Number*, 1948). Since anyone can tell a story in the movies, even a corpse has the opportunity in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Narration by a dead person would pose severe problems of credibility in a work of fiction unless it were a tale of the preternatural; yet the narration works in *Sunset Boulevard*, which, for all its realism, is similar to many other films about old Hollywood that resemble tales of the unearthly. In the film, Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), a former silent-screen star half crazed by memories of a past that will never return, believes she can make a comeback in a movie about Salome. She hires an out-of-work screenwriter, Joe Gillis (William Holden), to write the script in which she plans to star. When Gillis decides to leave her, Norma kills him. *Sunset Boulevard* begins with Gillis's body floating in a pool; Gillis's voice then proceeds to tell the story of his fatal association with Norma Desmond. The narration is ironically fitting: a corpse talking about the living dead.

Another Billy Wilder film, *Double Indemnity* (1944), is considered a classic of "I" narration. It opens with Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) entering a Los Angeles office building shortly before dawn. Neff describes himself as having "no visible scars"—none, that is, that can be seen *now*. Actually, he has just been shot by his mistress, whom he then killed. While Neff still has the strength, he recites his whole story into a dictaphone. The film then becomes a flashback in the form of a testimony that is being recorded and dramatized at the same time.

In "I" narration, if there is only one narrator, the narrator's voice will recur periodically throughout the course of the film. Narration by one character is a more difficult method, since the narration must unify the film, bridging the scenes as the action shifts from present to past. Neff's



Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) as the narrating "I" in *Double Indemnity* (1944), one of the finest examples of first-person narration in film. (Copyright Paramount Pictures, Courtesy MCA Publishing Rights, a Division of MCA Inc.)

narration in *Double Indemnity* succeeds because the flashbacks frequently end with a cue line, a line that triggers the next bit of dialogue so that the action can return to the present without an awkward transition. When Neff and Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) are in a supermarket plotting her husband's murder, Phyllis says, "Remember, we're in it together." "Yes, I remember," Neff answers into the dictaphone.

Sometimes the "I" tells his or her story in the hope of learning from it. Robert Bresson's *Une Femme Douce* (1969) opens with a suicide. Someone rushes to the veranda, a chair is overturned, a white shawl flutters through the air, and a woman's body falls to the pavement. A man, later revealed to be the woman's husband, begins to speak of her. Bresson keeps returning to her body, which now lies on a bed, to remind us that her husband is narrating the film. The approach is psychologically valid, for the husband is not so much recalling his wife as trying to understand why she committed suicide. At the end, he knows no more than he did at the beginning.

If the voice of the "I" is flat and dispassionate, the narration will have

a distancing effect, which may be desirable in a film in which the characters are not empathetic. "I" narration works well in *Badlands* (1973), whose characters are far from endearing. The heroine is a fifteen-year-old with cornflower eyes that look as if they have lost their physical and moral center; the hero, her boyfriend, can shoot a man in the back and then talk to him as if nothing had happened. Holly (Sissy Spacek), the heroine, narrates *Badlands* in a voice as flat as the western plains she and Kit (Martin Sheen) traverse. She is presumably telling the story to us, but it sounds as if she might be writing it for a pulp magazine. Some of the narration is grimly amusing, particularly when Holly tries to turn a phrase and instead produces a cliché ("Little did I realize that what began in the backways and alleys of this little town would end in the badlands of Montana"), or when she tries to be poetic and succeeds only in being trite ("When the leaves rustled overhead, it was as if the spirits were whispering about all the little things that were bothering them"). Her boyfriend's inclinations cause Holly to remark, "Suddenly I was thrown into a state of shock: Kit was the most trigger-happy person I ever met." The line is delivered so apathetically that audiences laugh, perhaps without realizing the implications of their laughter. At any rate, Holly's monotone prevents us from sympathizing with her and Kit.

### The Voice of God

Between 1945 and the early 1950s, the semidocumentary was a popular type of film. While a documentary is nonfiction, a semidocumentary is fiction based on fact (e.g., *The House on 92nd Street*, 1945; *Boomerang*, 1947). In the semidocumentary the credits often appear in a "typewriter" typeface to give the movie a "case history" look. An authoritative voice delivers the prologue, reminding the audience that the film sprang from today's headlines or the FBI's files and that it was shot on location. Since the voice belongs to no character, it is completely disembodied. As a result, it can weave in and out of the action, commenting, reflecting, even questioning. In the semidocumentary the disembodied voice (or voice-of-God technique, as it is sometimes called) has two advantages: it can impart a feeling of objectivity, which is required by a film of this kind, and it can insinuate itself into the characters, noting their moods and emotional states. The voice in *The Naked City* (1948) speaks directly to the characters as if it were an alter ego, confidant, and conscience combined. "How are your feet holding out, Alan?" it asks, or, "Lieutenant Muldoon, what's your hurry?" It even speaks to the audience: "Ever try to catch a murderer?" Since the voice had the first word, it is fitting that it should have the last: "There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them."

The disembodied voice is not restricted to the semidocumentary.

This scene from *Barry Lyndon* (1975) between Barry (Ryan O'Neal) and his son (David Morley) was introduced by the off-camera narrator who said: "Barry had his faults, but no man could say of him that he was not a good and tender father. He loved his son passionately, perhaps with a blind partiality. He denied him nothing." (Courtesy Warner Bros., Inc.)



Stanley Kubrick used it ingeniously in his 1975 adaptation of Thackeray's novel *Barry Lyndon*. Both the novel and the film have a narrator; however, in the film, the narrator is not Lyndon—as it was in the novel—but a voice behind the scenes, very much like the one in *The Naked City*, but much wittier and more urbane. It is actually the voice of the British actor Michael Hordern, which, like the traditional voice of God, is omniscient. The voice tells us about something before it happens or informs us of the outcome of an event without dramatizing it for us. When Lyndon is about to die, the voice even reads his obituary. The voice can speak with authority at this moment because it has been speaking with authority since the film began.

### Other Kinds of Voice-over

Voice-over is often used in movies that are not narrated by one of the characters but, for purpose of plot, require a character's voice to be heard. Such voices are variously labeled the *epistolary voice*, the *subjective voice*, the *repetitive voice*, and the *voice from the machine*.

### The Epistolary Voice

Advancing the plot through letters is a device common to both fiction and film. The epistolary novel has a long tradition that reaches back to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, written in the mid-eighteenth century. In film, the letter is a familiar means of setting the plot in motion (William Wyler's *The Letter*, 1940; *A Letter to Three Wives*) or of bridging the years (*Sea of Grass*, 1947). When an exchange of letters is used to mark the passage of time, voice-over is sufficient. In François Truffaut's *The Story of Adele H.* (1975), the epistolary voice is put to a variety of uses. We hear Adele's voice as she writes to Lieutenant Pinson, whom she has pursued to

Halifax in an attempt to regain his affection. When she writes to her father (later discovered to be Victor Hugo), we hear his reply. In addition to Adele's correspondence, we also hear her diary entries. When Pinson reads the love notes Adele has concealed in his pockets, her voice discloses their contents to us. After following Pinson to Barbados, she collapses in the street. A native woman brings Adele to her home. After learning that she is Victor Hugo's daughter, the woman writes a letter to the novelist, informing him of his daughter's pitiful condition.

In an era of film censorship, the epistolary voice was one way of having a character repent by voice-over confession. Robert Anderson's play *Tea and Sympathy* was considered unfilmable in the 1950s because of its subject matter: Tom Lee, a prep-school student thought to be homosexual because of his fondness for music and poetry, is initiated sexually by Laura Reynolds, the headmaster's wife. The play is best remembered for the final scene, in which Laura comes to Tom's room and slowly begins to unbutton her blouse. Pressing his hand against her breast, she makes one request: "Years from now, when you talk about this, and you will, be kind." When MGM decided to film the play in 1956, the Johnston Office\* felt that any woman who would offer her body to an adolescent should die. After much wrangling, the director, Vincente Minnelli, decided to make the plot a flashback occasioned by a class reunion at which Tom discovers a letter Laura had written to him. As Tom reads the letter, Laura's repentant voice is heard, urging him to forget what they have done (which is "wrong") and go out into the world and write edifying novels.

What we have been discussing are films in which the letter is a plot device whose contents must be heard. There are few films that are totally epistolary; that is, in which the entire film is a dramatization of a letter or a series of letters. In *A Walk in the Sun* (1945) and *Platoon* (1986), the narrator is writing letters to his sister and grandmother, respectively; however, it does not follow that each film is a dramatization of the letter the character is writing.

If a film is totally epistolary (and such films are rare), it really is an example of the narrating "I," since the epistolary voice is used only to tell the contents of a letter. Max Ophüls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), which revolves entirely around a letter Lisa (Joan Fontaine) has written to her former lover as she lay dying, is totally epistolary. Because the letter is such a personal document, we see only its powerful beginning ("By the time you read this letter I may be dead") and its unfinished ending. Otherwise we hear Lisa's voice, and experience the visualization of her

words. Yet the letter that is being dramatized is also being read by Lisa's lover, who never even bothered to learn her name. Thus, the audience and the lover learn about Lisa at the same time.

## The Subjective Voice

Movies abound with examples of the inner voice that literally speaks its mind (called *subjective voice*) because the audience requires access to the character's thoughts. Pip in *Great Expectations* (1947) wonders how Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, will greet him when he returns home dressed as a gentleman. In *The Accused* (1948), we hear what a psychology professor, who has killed a student in self-defense, is thinking when she realizes the consequences of her act. During her flight from Phoenix in *Psycho*, Marion Crane imagines what her employer will say on Monday morning when she fails to report for work.

A more complex form of the subjective voice appears in the stream-of-consciousness film. Although *stream of consciousness* has been applied to everything from inarticulate rambling to incoherent prose, it is really the unbroken flow of thoughts, memories, and associations in the waking mind. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), a stream-of-consciousness film, opens with a man and a woman making love. At first their skin looks charred, like that of the Hiroshima victims; then it becomes dewy, as though cleansed by the act of love. She is a French actor, and he is a Japanese architect she meets in Hiroshima while making a film. As their bodies move toward fulfillment, we hear their voices—his denying that she knows the significance of Hiroshima, hers insisting that she does. But these are not their actual voices; they sound distant, anesthetized. We are hearing the rhythms of poetry, not prose. It is each character's interior that we hear, an interior expressing itself in the language of memory, which is made up of both words and images. When the architect's voice says, "You know nothing of Hiroshima," her consciousness replies with pictures of the artifacts she has seen at the museum and with newsreel footage of the bombing of Hiroshima. When the woman says, "Who are you?," instead of a verbal reply we see a street in Hiroshima. The man is Hiroshima, the only name she will ever associate with him.

## The Repetitive Voice

A character, often the hero or the heroine, tosses restlessly in bed while someone's voice reverberates in his or her unconscious, repeating key dialogue from an earlier scene (in case the audience missed its significance). This kind of repetition, called the *repetitive voice*, occurs in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) when some comments made about Rebecca give Joan

\*The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Hollywood's self-censorship organization, was called the Johnston Office when it was headed by Eric Johnston from 1945 to 1963; previously it had been called the Hays Office and the Breen Office.

Fontaine's character a sleepless night. The same technique appears in *Cat People* when Irena keeps hearing the voice of her psychiatrist as Halloween cats prowl across the screen.

The repetitive voice has become so familiar that it runs the risk of becoming a cliché. Yet at times some kind of recapitulation is necessary, and the filmmaker must decide whether the repetition should be aural or visual. If the character's words are important, then it is only necessary to hear what he or she has said. At the end of *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett recalls the words her father had spoken earlier about the value of land and the importance of Tara. Hearing his words is sufficient. On the other hand, in *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), the repetition is visual. Since the film is a whodunit, crucial shots are repeated: guilt is often a question not of what one says but of how one reacts, so the passengers' reactions, not just their words, are recalled for us visually.

### The Voice from the Machine

Some filmmakers regard voice-over as the modern equivalent of the *deus ex machina* (god from the machine) of Greek theater. In certain Greek tragedies, a god would descend from a crane to resolve the action and bring the play to a conclusion. Some movies feature a "voice from the machine"; it belongs to none of the characters and materializes near the end to tie up any loose plot threads or offer some commentary on the action. The voice from the machine is not the voice of God, which is consistent throughout the film; the voice from the machine is heard only at the end. At the end of *The Lady and the Monster* (1944), a voice intrudes to remind us that Patrick Cory (Richard Arlen) has been sent to prison for his role in an experiment to keep a dead man's brain alive. The voice also reminds us that this is to be a film with a happy ending, and that Cory will emerge from jail to find his beloved waiting for him. Since no voice has been heard up to this point, we wonder whose it is. It must belong to a supernatural power that knows more about the script than the screenwriter does.

Despite its title, Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) is a superior horror film. Initially, the movie is narrated by the "I" of the title—a Canadian nurse who has come to the West Indies to tend to a woman who turns out to be a zombie. At the end, the zombie is killed by her brother-in-law, who then commits suicide. Suddenly, a male voice asks God to pardon the unholy couple. The switch from the nurse's voice to the voice from beyond imparts a moralistic tone to a film that otherwise has remained aloof from moral issues. Perhaps the coda was a sop to the Legion of Decency, which frowned on suicide. (The Legion of Decency was a Catholic organization that rated films along moral lines from 1934

through the mid-1960s.) Still, it vitiates the artistry of an unusually intelligent B movie.

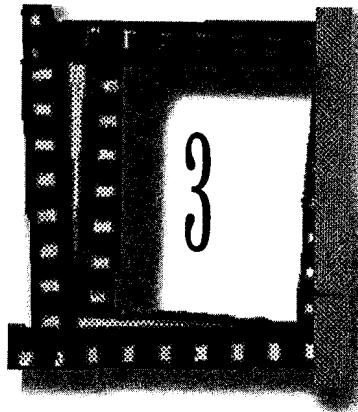
Voice-over, then, is not just faceless sound; it is a narrative device that can serve different purposes. It can be personal (the narrating "I") or impersonal (voice of God); it can reveal the contents of a letter or the contents of the unconscious; it can refresh a character's memory or our own. Because of its versatility, voice-over is often abused; for this reason, one should always be sure to approach its use critically.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a readable guide to all the individuals involved in the making of a movie, see Eric Taub, *Gaffers, Grips and Best Boys* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

# Film, Space, and Image

## CHAPTER



**A**s discussed in chapter 1, film can manipulate time. But it can also manipulate space. The subject can be near or far, partial or full, stationary or moving. How we see the image, and how much of it we see, are the result of the filmmaker's choice of shot.

### TYPES OF SHOTS

A shot is simply what is recorded by a single operation of the camera. Shots can be defined in terms of distance. Does the camera appear to be close to the subject? If so, the shot is a close-up (CU)—in terms of human anatomy, a shot of the head, for example. Perhaps it is a head-and-shoulders shot, in which case it is a close shot (CS). If it is a specific part of the

body—an eye, a mouth—the shot is an extreme close-up (ECU). A shot of the complete human figure, with some of the background visible, is a full shot (FS) or a long shot (LS). If the camera is so far away that the result is a broad, panoramic view, it is an extreme long shot (ELS). A shot that is neither a close shot nor a long shot but something in between is a medium shot (MS), showing, for example, the subject head to waist or waist to knees.

Perhaps the shot defines an area—a room, say, with all its appointments; such a shot is an establishing shot (ES), a type of long shot that is often broken down into its components. *Establishing shot* can also mean a shot that establishes location (e.g., the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco; the Eiffel Tower in Paris), so that the viewer knows the setting and where the action takes place.

Shots can also be defined by what they contain. A two-shot includes two characters; a three-shot includes three characters. "Shot/reverse shot" is the principle of alternating shots of characters in a conversation so that first one character, then the other is seen.

### CLOSE-UPS AND LONG SHOTS

Jean-Luc Godard was fond of saying that the close-up was invented for tragedy, the long shot for comedy. This is something of an oversimplification, since long shots and extreme long shots are staples of the western. But at least Godard was suggesting that filmmakers have reasons for choosing one shot over another depending on the kind of movie they are making or the type of scene they are shooting. A close-up can reveal a particular emotion for which, under the circumstances, a long shot would have been inappropriate. When Lucy (Lillian Gish) is denounced by her father in *Broken Blossoms*, Griffith uses a close-up to express her fear.

The close-up is also a means of emphasis. Hitchcock found it ideal for objects like a suspicious glass of milk (*Suspicion*, 1941), an envelope dropped by a Nazi agent (*Saboteur*, 1942), and a wine bottle filled with uranium ore (*Notorious*, 1946). These objects are so crucial to the plot that Hitchcock was unwilling to assume they would be noticed unless their presence was emphasized.

Hitchcock also used the extreme close-up for reasons having to do with genre. *Psycho* is a horror film; audiences expect the proverbial chill up the spine, and Hitchcock does not fail them: the extreme close-ups of Marion Crane's screaming mouth and staring eye in the shower sequence stay in the memory. Extreme close-ups of the eye are, in fact, standard in horror films, especially if it is the eye of the killer spying on a prospective victim through a peephole, as is the case in *Psycho* and *The Spiral Staircase* (1946).

The extreme close-up is not just an embellishment; like any shot, it can have a direct bearing on the plot. The words "Prognosis Negative," which confirm Judith Traherne's terminal condition in *Dark Victory*, must be visible, and that can only be done in extreme close-up. If a scar identifies a murderer, as it does in *A Stranger Knocks* (1963), the scar needs to be photographed in ECU.

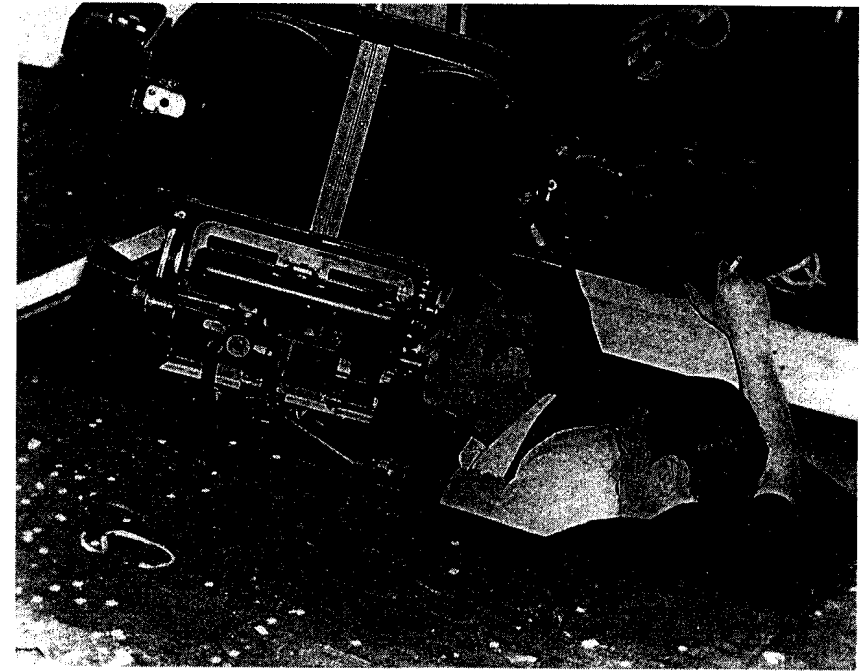
The ECU should be used sparingly, however; too many such shots create an imbalance in the film. They are such an extreme form of emphasis that a preponderance of them is like the speech pattern of someone who gives equal emphasis to every word, including *a* and *the*.

While the close-up is useful to point up the intense emotion of tragedy, the long shot—despite Godard's assertion—can be ideal for tragedy as well, since it makes death less painful to watch. The death of Santiago (Arthur Kennedy) in Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Naked Dawn* (1955) is photographed in long shot. Santiago is on horseback when the bullet strikes him; we see neither stunned eyes nor spurting blood. The shot has a formalized beauty about it that is reminiscent of a painting like Breughel's *Fall of Icarus*, in which the death of Icarus is made part of the setting.

Western filmmakers favor long shots and extreme long shots because these shots make the subject part of the environment in addition to conveying the vastness and awesomeness of nature. In George Stevens's *Shane* (1953), a deer laps water from a stream with snow-fringed mountains in the background. A man bids farewell to a woman who merges with the landscape as he rides off in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946). Many of Ford's long shots have an intensely pictorial quality. In *Clementine*, we see a stretch of sky brooding over the dusty main street of Tombstone, a bar thronged by men—sometimes in silhouette, sometimes illuminated by the kerosene lamps that hang overhead—and Monument Valley with its cliffs and mesas rising skyward from a flat plain and dwarfing all who pass beneath them.

## HIGH ANGLE AND LOW ANGLE SHOTS

Shots are also defined by the position of the camera in relation to the subject. When Lillian (Jane Fonda) looks out of her hotel window in *Julia* (1977), what she sees on the street below is rendered as a high-angle shot. In a high-angle shot, the camera is positioned above (sometimes "high above") the subject. This is occasionally referred to as a *God's eye view*, a type of shot used by Hitchcock to suggest an unseen presence looking



Orson Welles prepares for a low-angle shot, below floor level, in *Citizen Kane* (1941). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and RKO)

down on the subject. If the camera shoots up at the subject from below, it is a low-angle shot.

A low-angle shot makes the subject loom larger than it actually is. Such a shot can suggest dominance or power, as it does in *Citizen Kane* when Kane's guardian hovers over him as he presents the young Kane with a sled. Conversely, a high-angle shot makes the subject seem smaller than it is. When a member of the French underground interrogates the title character in *When Willie Comes Marching Home*, the high angle from which Willie is photographed suggests the feeling of helplessness that the intense cross-examination produces.

The high angle-shot of the president pacing the floor in D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* (1930) reminds us that the burdens of the office dwarf even the great. In *All the President's Men*, as reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein are sorting out library slips, the camera watches them from above; indeed, they seem to grow smaller as they realize the

enormity of their task. The scene ends with the camera's peering down at the reading room of the Library of Congress, which looks like a magnified snowflake.

Sometimes the script requires a high- or low-angle shot for reasons that have nothing to do with symbolism or imagery. In *Julia*, the shot following Lillian at the window had to be a high-angle shot; an eye-level shot would have made no sense. If a man is waiting at the foot of a staircase for a woman to descend, as Gabriel (Donal McCann) waits for Gretta (Anjelica Huston) near the end of John Huston's *The Dead* (1987), the woman must be photographed in a low-angle shot to match the man's angle of vision.

In *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), Mrs. Harwood (Veronica Lake) is on the mezzanine of a hotel when she phones down to Johnny Morrison (Alan Ladd) at the registration desk in the lobby; the camera had to shoot *down* at Morrison in order to match the angle from which Mrs. Harwood saw him. The context of the action determines the nature of the shot.

The same holds true of other types of shots; the screenplay and its interpretation by the filmmaker dictate the nature of the shots.

## SUBJECTIVE CAMERA

An objective shot represents what the camera sees; a subjective shot (sometimes referred to as subjective camera) represents what the character sees. As the Joads drive into a Hooverville in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the residents are looking straight ahead as they step aside for the truck. At whom are they staring? one might ask. They are looking at the Joads, whom we cannot see. Thus, they are looking at *us*: we have been put behind the wheel in order to see poverty and squalor through the Joads' eyes. When, through voice-over, Henry Hill in *GoodFellas* recalls the time he entered a Mafia restaurant, director Martin Scorsese used subjective camera. Instead of showing Hill personally making a round of the tables, the diners looked directly into the lens as if they were acknowledging Hill's presence. Subjective camera implied that Hill, though unseen, is still a force to be reckoned with.

Sometimes in a film we experience sheer motion without a corresponding image. In *Marnie*, for example, Mark (Sean Connery) is seated at his desk when Marnie enters the room. Mark looks straight into the camera, acknowledging Marnie's presence. We do not see her, however; we only experience some sense of movement toward the desk. For a moment we have become Marnie, but we cease to be Marnie when she comes into view.

Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman prepare for the Library of Congress scene in *All the President's Men* (1976). The camera is set for a high shot. (Courtesy Warner Bros., Inc.)



Because subjective camera offers a one-sided take on reality, it should never dominate a film as it did in *Lady in the Lake* (1946)—the textbook case of how not to make the audience a participant in the action. The main character in the film, Philip Marlowe (Robert Montgomery), is never seen except in a mirror. As a result, there are scenes in which the other characters, supposedly looking at him, stare straight into the camera, which represents Marlowe and, by extension, the audience. When a woman kisses Marlowe, she has to purse her lips into the lens, which makes it seem as though she is kissing the audience. When she lights Marlowe's cigarette, she thrusts the lighter into the lens as if she were about to ignite the viewer.

Subjective camera should be restricted to specific scenes or sequences, as is the case in *Dark Passage* (1947), in which the plot requires subjective shots. Unjustly convicted of his wife's murder, Vincent Parry (Humphrey Bogart) escapes from San Quentin to track down the real killer. He cannot solve the murder looking as he does because his picture



A low-angle shot of Gretta (Anjelica Huston) descending the stairs in *The Dead* (1987). (Frame enlargement courtesy Vestron Pictures)

is in every newspaper, so he chooses to undergo plastic surgery. Director Delmer Daves, who also wrote the screenplay, had two options. He could use another actor in the early scene and, after the operation, introduce Bogart, or he could use a combination of subjective camera and Bogart's voice for the first thirty minutes and then drop subjective camera after Bogart finally appears. Daves was pretty much forced to do the latter: in 1947, Humphrey Bogart was too big a star to make his initial appearance thirty minutes into the picture.

Parry escapes by concealing himself in a barrel that has been loaded onto a prison truck. The camera is totally subjective, jostling us as Parry maneuvers the barrel from the truck and making us reel with dizziness as it rolls down a hill. When the barrel comes to rest, we peer out of it cautiously but get no more than a tunnel-like view of the outside. Parry is now a presence. When he hitches a ride, the driver speaks to the presence, who answers but is still unseen. When the driver recognizes him, the presence knocks him unconscious. Later, the presence scans the highway and climbs into Irene Jansen's (Lauren Bacall) waiting car.

When the presence showers, a hand adjusts the shower head and a

A low-angle shot from *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959), showing Violet Venable (Katharine Hepburn) ascending in her private elevator. (Courtesy Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences)



jet of water sprays the camera lens. Camera movements express the presence's emotional state. When the presence is wary, the camera darts in the same direction as his apprehensive eyes. A telephone rings, and the camera swings around the way a tense person does at an unexpected sound. Gradually, Daves begins to switch from subjective to objective camera, from Parry as a presence to Parry as a character. The transition begins in a cab at night, so Bogart's face is kept in shadow. The sympathetic cab-driver recommends plastic surgery and refers Parry to a reliable doctor. After the operation, Bogart's voice returns to his body, and the camera ceases to be subjective.

Related to subjective camera is the point-of-view (POV) shot. A POV shot represents the point of view of the character, or what the character sees. A famous shot of this kind occurs at the end of Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) when Dr. Murchison (Leo G. Carroll) is unmasked as the murderer of the former director of a mental institution. Murchison aims a gun at his accuser and then turns it around to fire at himself. The close-up of the gun with which Murchison commits suicide is a POV shot, representing the way he saw the gun when he turned it on himself.





Philip Marlowe's (Robert Montgomery) reflection in *Lady in the Lake* (1946), the subjective camera film in which Marlowe is visible only when a mirror catches his image. (Courtesy WCFTF)

## SHOTS AS PARTS OF A WHOLE

It is easy to become enamored of particular shots, especially those that are strikingly photographed. The close-up of the burning crucifix in *Amadeus* (1986) is a powerful moment in the film. It would still have an impact, though perhaps not the same kind, if one saw a still or a frame enlargement of it without having seen the film. It is the context that makes the shot not only powerful but chilling: Salieri, realizing Mozart's superiority, is so angry with God for giving him a rival that he destroys a symbol of his faith. The clock without hands that the main character sees in his dream in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) is a shot that would still have an effect if it were taken out of context. If one were shown a still or a frame enlargement of it and asked what it meant, the reply would be something like "time has stopped" or even "death"—a good answer, and not all that different from what it means in the film. But in *Wild Strawberries*, the clock without hands is one of the film's many death symbols; it therefore takes

Tight framing in *Detour* (1946). The camera tracks in for a close-up of Roberts (Tom Neal), who looks imprisoned within the frame. (Frame enlargement courtesy John Belton)



on its deepest meaning within the context of the film, which is a death odyssey.

At the end of *Radio Days*, a father holds his son lovingly on his lap. Anyone who saw a still of that scene without knowing anything about the film would assume that the character was a caring father. Yet throughout the movie, it is obvious that the father is not especially affectionate toward his son. The reason the boy is on his father's lap is that he is getting a spanking. As he is being spanked, a report comes over the radio that a child who had fallen into a well has died. Suddenly the father's attitude changes, and instead of punishing his son he caresses him. The death of someone else's child has made the father feel warmer toward his own.

Shots are like excerpts; just as some excerpts communicate more information than others, so, too, do shots. The excerpt is part of the work, just as the shot is part of the total film in which its meaning resides.

## FRAMING THE SHOT

The concept of framing is easily understood by anyone who has either studied painting or has actually painted. Framing is the act, and sometimes the art, of composing a shot, reflecting decisions similar to those painters make about how their canvas will ultimately look. The filmmaker's canvas is the frame, the strip of celluloid on which the image is captured. Like a painter, the filmmaker must arrange the details of the frame in terms of the visual or dramatic points being made, or the ideas being expressed.

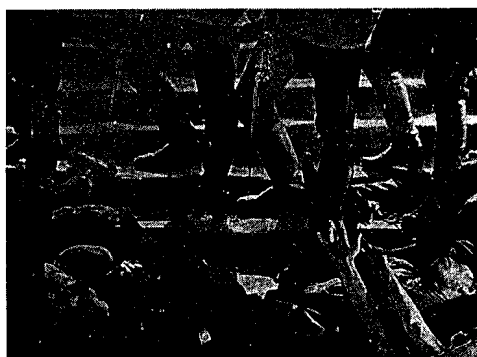
Although there are no ironclad rules of framing, certain principles are widely followed.

*Tight framing gives a feeling of oppression.* In tight framing, the subject appears confined within the horizontal and vertical borders of the frame so that there is not even a hint of offscreen space. To create an atmosphere of



THE CONFLICT OF LINES IN THE ODESSA STEPS SEQUENCE OF *POTEMKIN*

The shadows cast by the Cossacks create ominous diagonals on the steps in *Potemkin* (1925). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)

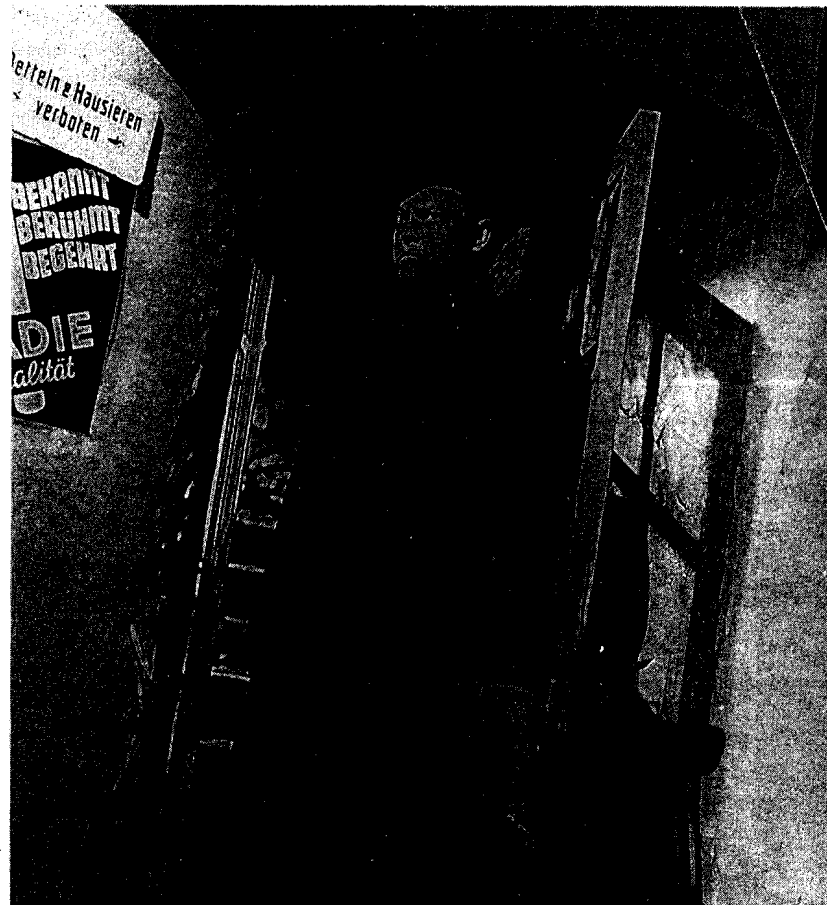


The juxtaposition of strong verticals (the soldiers' legs) and stable horizontals (steps) with broken lines (sprawled bodies and hands raised in supplication) suggest the dominance of the Cossacks and the helplessness of the people in *Potemkin*. (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)

fatalism, Edgar G. Ulmer chose tight framing for several shots of Roberts (Tom Neal) in *Detour* (1946). When Roberts's face is trapped within the frame, destiny seems to be closing in on him.

*The frame should be slightly asymmetrical.* Whatever is to be emphasized should occupy a position of prominence, but not in the center of the frame. If the image were dead center, a sense of depth would be lost because the subject would seem to be stamped on the frame. If a disorienting or unusual effect is sought, the extremity of the frame might be used. For example, in *Detour*, when Roberts discovers that Vera (Ann Savage) has accidentally strangled herself with a telephone cord, her body is seen right of frame, the head hanging over the bed.

*Vertical and horizontal compositions denote solidarity; diagonals and oblique compositions denote tension.* In *Potemkin*, the masts of the ships, the raised arms of the sailors, and the waving arms of the people suggest a solidarity that is destroyed when the Cossacks appear at the top of the Odessa steps. Their shadows falling on the steps create a diagonal that breaks the unity. A canted shot (also known as a Dutch angle shot) results in an



CANTED SHOTS

A canted shot of Orson Welles as Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (1949). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA)

oblique composition in which the frame looks lopsided. Edgar G. Ulmer uses canted shots in *Bluebeard* (1944) to emphasize the madness of the central character; the canted shots in *The Third Man* (1949) imply a world in which things are askew. In the violent argument between the title character and her mother in *Carrie* (1976), the frame looks as if it will tip over.

When an IRA hostage speaks wistfully of his "special friendship" with a hairdresser in *The Crying Game* (1992), director Neil Jordan chooses

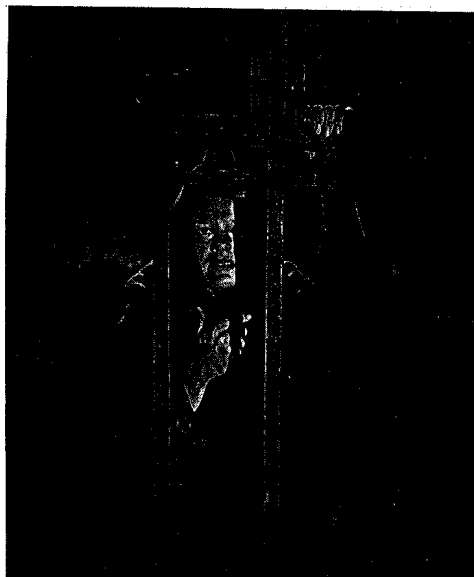
a canted shot, which should cause us to wonder why the frame is tipped. Is Jordan suggesting that their relationship is not entirely conventional? Eventually we discover that this is the case: the hairdresser is a transvestite.

Sometimes vertical framing is intentionally ironic. In *Address*



#### DECEPTIVE AND DEBARRING VERTICALS

Griselle (K. T. Stevens) in *Address Unknown* (1944) is framed between two trees, expecting to be saved from the mob that is pursuing her. Here the verticals are a support, but only a temporary one. (Courtesy Sony Pictures Entertainment)



Griselle before the gate leading to the home of a family friend who will not receive her (*Address Unknown*). (Courtesy Sony Pictures Entertainment)

*Unknown* (1944), Griselle (K. T. Stevens) flees from a mob that has discovered she is Jewish. She hopes to find refuge in the home of a family friend. Framed by trees, she looks hopefully into the distance where the friend lives. Ordinarily, such a composition, with its strong verticals, would imply hope. However, Griselle is a Jew in Nazi Germany, and the man she assumes is a friend has become a Nazi.

Vertical bars across the face, on the other hand, have another connotation: mystery, imprisonment, exclusion. When Carmen (Rita Hayworth) appears behind a beaded curtain in *The Loves of Carmen* (1948), the verticals give her face an exotic yet dangerous look. When Griselle, in *Address Unknown*, finally arrives at the friend's house and stands before the gate, the composition recalls the earlier one in which she was framed by trees. Here, however, the gate is a barrier, and even though she reaches it she still does not gain access to the house. The use of verticals in this different composition, as bars across the face, suggests exclusion: prevented from entering, Griselle is killed by the Gestapo.

*Geometrical compositions can be symbolic as well as visually interesting.* In Jungian psychology, the circle is a symbol of wholeness, suggesting unity and commonality. Such is the case in *Sahara* (1943) when Sergeant Joe Gunn (Humphrey Bogart) passes a cup of water around to his thirsty men, who stand in a circle. If a composition involves three characters, triangular arrangements can make a statement about their relationship, as is the case in François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1961), in which two men share the affections of the same woman.

*Iconography should be unobtrusive.* If the filmmaker is imitating a painting or a sculpture, the composition should look natural even though it is a replica of, or an homage to, a favorite work of art. The beggars' banquet in Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961) is an obvious parody of *The Last Supper*, made even more so by the use of the "Hallelujah Chorus" as background music. A less blatant parody of *The Last Supper* occurs in Robert Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970) when the medics stage a literal last supper for the dentist who plans to commit suicide because he thinks he is impotent. Christ imagery with crucifixion and "way of the cross" motifs tends to call attention to itself: when the bloodied Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) staggers along the dock at the end of *On the Waterfront* (1954), one might recall Christ on his way to Calvary. A more subtle "way of the cross" appears in Capra's *Meet John Doe* (1941) when the title character makes his lonely way through a crowd that reviles him.

*The angle at which the subject is viewed is determined by two factors: narrative logic and symbolic implications.* As we have seen, if a character is looking out of a hotel window onto the street below, the shot that follows must be a high-angle one. Similarly, if a character is on the ground looking up at someone, the person at whom the character is looking must be pho-



TRIANGULAR COMPOSITIONS IN *JULES AND JIM* (1961) SHOWING CATHERINE (JEANNE MOREAU), JULES (OSCAR WERNER), AND JIM (HENRI SERRE), WHO BECOME A *MÉNAGE À TROIS*. The *ménage* running. (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)



The *ménage* shot from below. (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)



A different triangular composition from *Citizen Kane* (1941), showing Kane (center) flanked by Thatcher (left) and Bernstein (right) as he is about to relinquish control of his enterprises after the crash of 1929. The position of Kane at the apex of the triangle makes him both the focus of attention and an object of defeat, since he is dwarfed by the more prominent figures of Thatcher and Bernstein. (Courtesy MOMA/FSA)

tographed at a low angle, with the camera shooting upward. Since subjects photographed from a high angle look small and those photographed from a low angle look large, high-angle shots can imply inferiority, defeat, or oppression; low-angle shots, power, dominance, superiority. Susan Alexander Kane is often photographed at a high angle in *Citizen Kane* because she is dominated by her husband, who is often photographed from a low angle.

The focus within the frame depends on how much or how little is to be seen. If the filmmaker decides that in a particular shot, foreground, middle ground, and background should be equally visible, the shot will have a deep focus. In *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles used deep focus for several reasons: to convey a greater sense of depth, to minimize the need to cut from one shot to another, and to bring out meanings that might not otherwise be apparent. The classic deep-focus shot in *Kane* shows Mary Kane making arrangements with a banker who is to raise her son as a gentleman because she and her husband cannot. The position of the mother

(foreground), banker and father (middle ground), and son (background, seen through the window blissfully playing in the snow) says infinitely more about the way young Kane's life is being signed away without his knowledge than would be the case if the action were broken down into four separate shots: mother, father, banker, son.

Sometimes shallow focus is preferred—for example, when the background should not be as distinct as the foreground because it would detract from the foreground. At other times, the background must remain indistinct until the time for it to be clear. In such a case, the filmmaker will pull focus: first, the background will be a blur and the foreground sharp; then the background will be sharp and the foreground blurry. This technique, known as *rack focus*, is used in *Time After Time* (1976). Someone is behind the heroine, but the person's face is a blur. Then the face comes into focus, and we realize that it is Jack the Ripper's.

Focus may be deliberately erratic, with the image going in and out of focus, as might happen if a character is hallucinating, disoriented, or drunk. In *Detour*, when Roberts realizes that Vera has accidentally strangled herself, objects go in and out of focus as he looks around the room in a state of shock.



Iconographic Framing: *The Last Supper* parody in *Viridiana* (1961). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)



Another *Last Supper* parody in *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970). (Courtesy Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences)

If the frame is to be masked—that is, if its shape is to be altered—the same considerations that govern other framing techniques apply: narrative logic and symbolic value. If a character is peering through a pair of binoculars, a telescope, a microscope, or a keyhole, the next shot should assume the appropriate configuration.

If a character is positioned in a doorway, the result is a frame-within-a-frame, or double framing; within the film frame is another frame—the frame created by the doorway. Double framing may reveal something about the character so framed. John Ford often uses the frame-within-the-frame, especially in *The Searchers* (1956). When Ethan (John Wayne), who will always be a loner and a searcher, returns with Debbie, the object of his search, he remains in a doorway while the others go inside the house.

Because doorways and archways resemble the proscenium arch of a theater, they have a dramatic effect. In John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952), Mary Kate (Maureen O'Hara) is framed in the doorway as Sean (John Wayne) pulls her toward him. In William Wyler's *The Little Foxes* (1941), the Hubbards do their plotting in the archway of the drawing room, thus seeming like the stage villains they were in Lillian Hellman's play.

The long take—a shot that lasts more than a minute—can also be framed. Recall the definition of a shot: a single run of the camera. The camera can accommodate ten minutes' worth of film, although few filmmakers would

allow it to run for that length (Hitchcock did so in *Rope* [1948], an eighty-minute film consisting of eight ten-minute takes. *Rope*, however, was an experiment—and not an especially successful one.) The average shot lasts between ten and twenty seconds, but many shots are often longer, and even a three-minute shot can be framed.

The most famous long take in American film is the three-minute credits sequence in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958). Someone puts a time bomb in the trunk of a car. Two people get into the car and proceed down the street of a Mexican border town, past Mr. and Mrs. Vargas (Charlton Heston and Janet Leigh). The Vargases reach the customs booth before the couple do. In their conversation with the customs officer, we learn that Mrs. Vargas is American and Mr. Vargas, soon revealed to be Mexican, is a narcotics agent. Then the car with the couple pulls up to the booth. The driver, Mr. Linnekar, is known to the customs officer. The woman with him, who admits that she is not an American citizen, complains about a "ticking noise," but the customs officer does not take her seriously. The Vargases, who behave like newlyweds, are more interested in each other than in the occupants of the car. The car crosses the border, continues a short distance, and then explodes into flames. Within three minutes of uninterrupted camera movement, we have had the credits, been introduced to two of the main characters, discovered that the drug trade will be an important element of the plot, learned that Mrs. Vargas is American while her husband is Mexican, witnessed a car bombing that will have to be explained, and entered a world where the unpredictable and the incalculable are the norm. Welles chose to make the credits sequence of *Touch of Evil* a long take and framed it accordingly, creating an atmosphere of restlessness with a camera that is continually moving.

In *GoodFellas*, there is a long take that lasts well over a minute. It begins with Henry Hill and Karen entering the Copacabana through the kitchen; as they do, the camera follows them, proceeding through a labyrinth of corridors and past stoves, ovens, and sinks—up a flight of stairs into the foyer, where, despite a reservations line, the couple are immediately escorted to a table to which a waiter brings their specially prepared meal. But the shot does not end there; Scorsese pans right to left—to the next table, where a party is seated that obviously knows Henry; and then diagonally to the bandstand, where the comedian Henny Youngman is set to perform. The beauty of Scorsese's long take is its ability to capture the unbroken rhythm of an action through camera work of incredible fluidity.

Shots can be framed graphically in terms of lines (horizontals, verticals, diagonals); they can be framed geometrically or iconographically; in deep or shallow focus; from a high or a low angle; in a frame that has been masked or doubled. A shot can last a second or run ten minutes. Guided

by a script that requires a scene to be filmed in a particular way and by aesthetic considerations that will enhance the script and enrich the narrative, the filmmaker makes his or her decisions. These decisions, however, should not be accepted on faith; rather, the viewer should ask if the decisions were the right ones.

## THE MOVING SHOT

Movement in film can be deceptive. In the three-minute long take in *Touch of Evil*, the camera was literally moving. However, when the camera rotates horizontally on a fixed axis (pan shot) or vertically (tilt shot), it is not, strictly speaking, moving. The camera head—but not the camera itself, which is probably on a tripod—is moving. For mobile camera shots, the camera is on a moving vehicle such as a dolly, a truck, or a crane, or on specially built tracks. The mobile camera has the advantage of being able to add to the narrative by opening up more space, thereby augmenting what is seen. The pan and the tilt can add to our knowledge, too.

Pan shots generally move left to right in imitation of the reading eye, but they can also go from right to left. In *The Thin Man* (1934), it does both in the same shot. As Nora Charles (Myrna Loy) opens a door on the right, the camera pans right to left, from the doorway to the interior, where her husband is comforting a weeping girl. When the husband catches sight of his wife, the camera pans left to right, back to Nora in the doorway, as if it, too, were embarrassed at what it has discovered. Through panning, a filmmaker can have the camera comment on a situation, thus making the camera almost a character. As David Locke (Jack Nicholson) in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975) cries aloud in desperation because his Land Rover is stalled in the sand, the camera answers by panning the indifferent desert. Martin Scorsese uses slow, almost languid pans of the characters' living rooms in *The Age of Innocence*—the slow panning suggesting lives of leisure. A swish pan (unusually rapid panning that produces a momentary blur) can suggest a sudden change or a transformation. In Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932), there is a swish pan immediately after Dr. Jekyll drinks the potion and becomes Mr. Hyde.

When the camera pivots vertically, the result is a tilt shot (sometimes called a vertical pan; hence the expression *pan up/down*). Tilting also mimics eye movement: in this case the eye's tendency to move up the face of a building to take in its height, or down a column of names. In *Jane Eyre* (1944), the camera tilts down from a plaque that reads "Lowood Institution" to the figure of the sleeping Jane Eyre, who is being carried into it. In *Citizen Kane*, the camera tilts up to the entrance gate of Kane's estate, Xanadu, past the No Trespassing sign, reminding us that the warning ap-

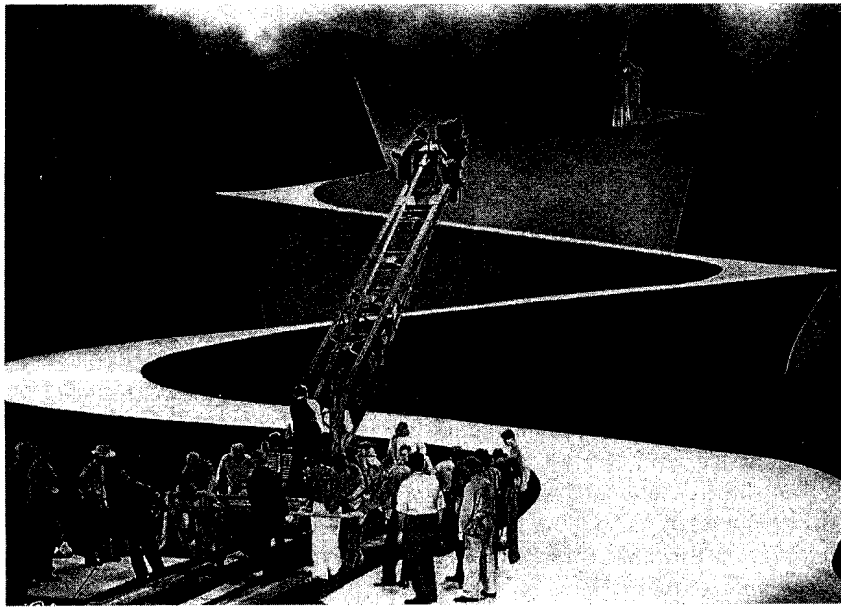
plies to everyone but itself. At the end of the film, the camera tilts *down* the gate to the No Trespassing sign as it returns to its starting point.

Like the pan, the tilt shot can be a silent spectator, commenting visually on a situation. As the vampire is about to sink her teeth into a victim's neck in *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), the camera begins tilting up the wall, leaving the rest to the viewer's imagination. A tilt shot can even suggest the actual or potential fate of a character. When Phillip Vandamm (James Mason) in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) discovers that his mistress is an American agent, he decides to kill her aboard a plane: "This matter is something that is best disposed of at a great height—over water," he remarks. At the mention of *height*, the camera tilts up—to nothing but empty space.

As it pans or tilts, the camera guides the eye horizontally or vertically, determining both the direction and the object of the audience's vision. Tilt-pan and pan-tilt combinations are also possible, to direct the viewer's or the character's gaze across one surface and up or down another. In *The Passenger*, the camera is in the process of tracing the curve of a surface wire up the wall of a hotel room when a sudden knock at the door interrupts its ascent, causing it to backtrack over to the door to see who is there.

A combination of panning and tilting occurs in the notorious flashback in Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950), which is later revealed to have been a total lie. Jonathan Cooper (Richard Todd) is explaining to his bewildered girlfriend how Charlotte Inwood (Marlene Dietrich) begged him to go to her flat and bring her a new dress; it seems the one she was wearing is stained with her husband's blood. As Cooper enters the flat, the camera pans across the room to Mr. Inwood's body and then tilts up a closet door. At first the camera's tilting up a clothes closet seems odd, but it is part of Hitchcock's plan to make Cooper's story believable. Thus, Hitchcock has the camera guide Cooper to the closet, from which he removes the dress, as if Cooper did not know where the closet was. If Cooper had headed straight for the closet, the audience would sense that he was more familiar with Charlotte's flat than he should be and would therefore not accept his story.

As we have seen, in panning and tilting the camera itself does not move. Strictly speaking, then, a pan or a tilt is not a moving shot, since the camera merely rotates on a tripod. In a moving shot, the camera moves with, toward, alongside, or away from its subjects. There are several kinds of moving shots, depending on the way in which the camera moves. If it moves on tracks, it is a tracking shot; if it is mounted on a dolly, a dolly shot; if it moves up and down, in and out of a scene on a crane, it is a crane shot, which is easily identified by its ascending or descending motion, although a crane can move laterally as well.



Preparing for a crane shot in *Cover Girl* (1944), with the camera in a mechanical arm.  
(Courtesy MOMA/FSA)

Some writers use the terms *dolly shot* and *tracking shot* interchangeably; the camera dollies in (tracks in) when it moves toward the subject and dollies out (tracks out) when it moves away from the subject. Other writers simply call any shot in which the camera is moving on a vehicle (a truck, a dolly, a bicycle) a tracking shot, which is identified by the direction of the camera: forward tracking shot, vertical tracking shot, diagonal tracking shot.

Tracking shots have distinct advantages over other types because they can encompass a greater area and supply more detail; thus, they can sustain a mood for a longer period of time. While the pan and tilt can act as a silent commentator, the track can be a character's alter ego or unseen companion. Max Ophuls was a master of the moving shot. In his films, the camera seems to waltz and glide; it can rush up the stairs with the breathless lovers or accompany them on a stroll, occasionally slipping behind a fountain so as not to be conspicuous. In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophuls makes the camera almost human. As a provincial band ruins Wagner's "Song to the Evening Star," the camera, unable to stand the

tinny sound, rises up fastidiously and leaves the square. In the same film, the camera accompanies the operagoers up the grand staircase as if it were escorting them.

The moving camera can draw viewers physically into the action, and it can even lure them into a character's consciousness, as it does in the film version of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The crane shot that ends the film is one of the great feats of moviemaking; in it Lumet manages to incorporate almost all of Mary Tyrone's great monologue. Mary (Katharine Hepburn) is in her parlor with her husband and two sons. She recalls how a nun had dissuaded her from entering the convent because she claimed to have visions of Our Lady of Lourdes. If regression could be visualized, it would consist of gradual diminution. Almost as soon as Mary begins her monologue, the camera starts pulling back from her; then it rises up as her thoughts leave this world. As Mary grows smaller, so do her husband and sons. As the monologue draws to a close, Mary appears in close-up as she speaks the final lines: "That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time." Mary's close-up is followed by close-ups of the other Tyrones; then there is one last close-up of Mary's face, now strangely peaceful.

Many filmmakers today favor the Steadicam for moving shots because it reduces the need for complex camera setups. The principle is simple: the camera is attached to a body harness worn by the cameraperson, enabling him or her to achieve the fluidity of a mobile camera without the jerkiness that usually results from a handheld camera.

## DOOMS AND FREEZES

Likewise, many filmmakers prefer the zoom to the moving shot because it is both economical and timesaving. Technically, the zoom is not a moving shot because the camera does not move; rather, an adjustable lens gives the impression of its moving close to, or far away from, the subject (hence, the terms *zoom in/zoom out*). There are occasions when a zoom is useful: to single out someone in a crowd, to pinpoint the criminal's hiding place in the woods, to capture a facial expression without the person's being aware of the camera's presence. Zooming also flattens the image, creating an unreal sense of depth. However, some filmmakers may prefer such a two-dimensional effect. Stanley Kubrick clearly did in *Barry Lyndon*, in which he deliberately zoomed out of close-ups to reveal scenes that resembled paintings—a technique in keeping with his purpose of portraying the eighteenth century as if it were on exhibit at an art gallery.

The opposite of the zoom, which represents deceptive motion, is the





The most famous freeze frame in film: the final shot in *The 400 Blows* (1959). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)

freeze, which is a form of stopped motion. In a freeze, all movement suddenly halts, and the image “freezes” as it turns into a still photograph. The most famous freeze occurs at the end of François Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959). Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) escapes from a reformatory and heads toward the ocean. When he reaches the water’s edge, he walks into the shallows; then he turns and faces the shore. At that instant Truffaut freezes the frame, trapping Antoine between the reformatory and the ocean, between the past and the present. The freeze implies immobility, helplessness, or indecision.

The zoom and the freeze are similar in that they can call attention to details more dramatically than other devices do. Because of their strong underscoring power, they are as easily misused as italics are by inexperienced writers. Since many contemporary films end with a freeze frame, which then becomes the background for the end credits, examples of an intelligent use of the freeze frame are hard to come by. A great filmmaker will freeze for a reason; a mediocre one will freeze for effect. The freeze at the end of *Women in Love* (1970), the film version of D. H. Lawrence’s novel, is perfectly motivated. The novel comes to no real resolution. The film duplicates the unresolved ending by repeating Lawrence’s dialogue,

which leads to a natural freeze. When Birkin (Alan Bates) tells Ursula (Jennie Linden) that he wants an “eternal” relationship with another man, Ursula, who cannot conceive of such a relationship, says, “You can’t have it, because it’s false, impossible.” Birkin replies, “I don’t believe that,” and with these words the novel ends. The same dialogue appears in the film, but when Birkin says, “I don’t believe that,” Ursula’s face freezes into utter bafflement. His words have left her speechless, and what conveys speechlessness better than a freeze?



In film, shots combine to form sequences, or what we generally think of as scenes. Note that some writers prefer to distinguish between a scene and a sequence. A scene, they would say, is a unit of the action that takes place in the same location and is made up of one shot (e.g., a long take) or many shots. A sequence is a group of shots forming a self-contained segment of the film that is by and large intelligible in itself.

From the above definitions, *scene* and *sequence* appear to be virtually synonymous, and for all practical purposes they are. The chief difference is that there can be scenes within a sequence, but not sequences within scenes. In the key sequence in *Notorious*, there are several scenes. The sequence begins in the bedroom with Alicia’s removing the key to the wine cellar from Alex’s key chain (scene 1); next, she gives the key to Devlin downstairs (scene 2); finally, Devlin and Alicia go down to the wine cellar (scene 3).

There are several kinds of sequences, two of which have already been discussed: credits and precredits sequences (chapter 2). Someone who has not seen Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and is shown only the credits sequence would still be able to make some sense of it. What appears to be a detachment of cavalry troops rides into a small town. Some children are feeding a pair of scorpions to a horde of ants. The soldiers ride past the children and proceed up the main street toward the payroll office. On the rooftops of the buildings flanking the street is a band of armed men crouching behind the parapets. The soldiers dismount at the payroll office, enter it, flash their .45s, and pistol-whip the employees. By the time all the credits have appeared, a drama in miniature has unfolded in the form of a sequence. The peaceful tenor of the town has been established and threatened. We now know that the troops are bandits; the rooftop crowd, bounty hunters in the employ of the railroad; the townspeople and children, unsuspecting victims of the crossfire that will certainly erupt.



Sequences can also be identified as linear, associative, and montage. Note that these types of sequences are not mutually exclusive. Credits and precredits sequences can be linear (with a beginning, a middle, and an end); they can also be a montage of various shots (like the New York montage that accompanies the credits of Woody Allen's *Manhattan*, 1979). Similarly, an associative sequence can be linear (although a linear sequence is not associative). When a sequence is designated as associative, it means that the links between beginning, middle, and end are not so much narrative as visual.

## The Linear Sequence

In a linear sequence, one action links up with another, creating a miniature drama with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Let us return to the key sequence in *Notorious*. The beginning of the sequence initiates the action: Alicia removes the key. The middle adds to the action: Alicia slips the key to her coworker, Harry Devlin, during the party; they proceed to the wine cellar, where they discover that one of the bottles contains uranium ore; meanwhile, the champagne supply dwindles, and Alicia's husband and the wine steward go down to the cellar. The end follows and completes the action: the husband discovers his wife with Devlin. In a linear sequence, then, the connections between the incidents are like links in a chain.

After *The Age of Innocence* main title with its rose motif, the action begins with a shot of a basket of daisies—another instance of the role flowers play in the film. A hand plucks one of the daisies; it is the hand of the soprano-singing Marguerite in a performance of Gounod's *Faust*. The setting, then, is an opera house. Everyone is elegantly attired, as shots of bejeweled hands and necks indicate. And the audience is less interested in the opera than in who is sitting next to whom, as the camera imitates the way gossipmongers might use their opera glasses. Newland Archer (Daniel Day Lewis) is seated in a box, wearing a white rose in his lapel. In another box are three women, two of whom will play important roles in his life: his fiancée, May (Winona Ryder), and the Countess Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), whose colorful past has made her an object of speculation and, among the self-righteous, scorn. Although Newland insists that his engagement be announced at the ball following the performance, he chooses to sit behind the countess. Indifferent to the opera, they recall their childhood together. *Faust*, which will be heard again, was not an arbitrary choice on Scorsese's part. In the opera, Faust gives up his soul to possess Marguerite. In the film, Archer sells his soul, one might say, to respectability by choosing to marry the conventional May rather than the unconventional countess, whom he really loves. Although the opening sequence lasts only a few minutes, it establishes the setting (mid-nineteenth-

century New York) and introduces the characters (New York society), three of whom (Archer, May, and the countess) become the principal ones. The beginning introduces us to a privileged world; the middle, to a world where appearances alone count; and the end, to a world where a man who cannot wait to announce his engagement to an innocent young woman chooses to sit next to one whose innocence is questionable.

In some linear sequences, however, a few links may be missing; thus, the sequence is *elliptical*. A linear sequence is designated as elliptical when certain details have been omitted because the viewers are expected to make the connections for themselves. The "Wedding of Angharad" sequence in John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) comprises three episodes that appear, on the surface, to be loosely related: "The Courting of Angharad," "The Visit to Gruffydd," and "The Wedding." In the first episode, Evans, a mine owner's son, comes to court Angharad (Maureen O'Hara) after his pompous father has made the initial arrangements. Since Angharad appears to have a mind of her own, there is little likelihood that Evans will win her despite his wealth. Thus, we do not take the courting seriously. In the second episode, Angharad calls on Mr. Gruffydd (Walter Pidgeon), the minister, whom she really loves. There is something disturbing about this episode—it hints at love never to be consummated. Angharad speaks of her affection for the minister to discover if he feels the same toward her. But his only concern is his low salary, which makes marriage impossible. In the third episode, Angharad steps wraithlike into a carriage, her bridal veil billowing in the breeze.

The three episodes become linked by the impressions they create in the audience's mind. Initially, there seems to be no connection between the courting and Angharad's visit to Gruffydd, but the link becomes clear with the final episode: *money*, which means nothing to Angharad but means a great deal to the minister. In choosing Evans, she chose what Gruffydd considered the prerequisite for marriage. The folly of her choice is a mirthless wedding where the wind makes sport of her veil as if it were a kite. The tragedy of her choice is mirrored in the minister's face as he watches the wedding party drive away.

## The Associative Sequence

In an associative sequence, the scenes are linked together by an object or a series of objects. In another sequence in *Notorious*, Alicia, who has fallen in love with Devlin, plans an intimate dinner for the two of them. As Devlin leaves for headquarters, Alicia asks him to pick up some wine. In the next scene, Devlin enters his supervisor's office with a bottle of champagne, which he leaves on the desk. When he discovers that Alicia's assignment requires her to seduce Sebastian, he is so disturbed that he forgets the cham-



Harry Devlin (Cary Grant) on the verge of forgetting the champagne in *Notorious* (1946). Hitchcock ends the scene with a close-up of the bottle, the object that unifies the entire sequence. (Courtesy ABC Picture Holdings, Inc.)

pagne. Scene 2 ends with a close-up of the bottle. In the third scene, Devlin is back in Alicia's apartment, where the dinner is burned and there is not even any wine to salvage the evening. He looks around for the champagne: "I guess I left it somewhere," he mutters. These three episodes coalesce into a sequence that might be entitled "The Ruined Dinner," whose three scenes might be called "The Bottle Suggested," "The Bottle Purchased," and "The Bottle Forgotten." It is an object that unifies the sequence: the close-up of the bottle in scene 2 links scenes 1 and 3, bringing them into dramatic focus.

A similar sequence occurs in Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. Maxim de Winter's new bride lives in the shadow of her husband's first wife, Rebecca, whose presence is everywhere. In a sequence that might be called "The Ubiquitous Rebecca," we first see a shot of Rebecca's room, closed since her death and guarded by her dog; then a napkin with Rebecca's initials; finally, Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier) and his young bride (Joan Fontaine)

at opposite ends of a long table. What separates them is not just distance but the spirit of Rebecca, who is present even in the napkins on the table. Hitchcock has fashioned a sequence out of three different shots, each dominated by an object associated with the late Rebecca de Winter: a bedroom door, an embroidered napkin, and a dining-room table.

In the sequence that ends another Hitchcock film, *North by Northwest*, Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint) is holding on to the hand of Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) to keep from sliding off Mt. Rushmore. Thornhill encourages her to "hang in there" and, as an added incentive, proposes marriage. In one of the smoothest transitions in film, the hand to which Eve was just clinging is now helping her climb to the upper berth of a compartment on the Twentieth Century Limited. Without the audience's suspecting it, the scene changed from Mt. Rushmore to the train compartment. Thornhill's hand was the unifying image; it rescued Eve from death and saved her for marriage.

## The Montage Sequence

*Montage* is a word that has many meanings. When it is used to describe a sequence, *montage* can be defined as a series of shots arranged in a particular order for a particular purpose. In a montage sequence, the shots are arranged so that they follow each other in rapid succession, telescoping an event or several events of some duration into a couple of seconds of screen time. *A New Life* (1988) contains a dating montage that shows a newly divorced woman trying to resume a form of socializing she has not done in twenty-five years. Another kind of montage, called *American montage* because it was so prominent in American films of the 1930s and 1940s, works from the same principle: time is collapsed as shots blend together, wipe each other away, or are superimposed on each other. A typical American montage might consist of calendar pages blowing away as one month yields to another, then one year to another, while over the blowing pages are superimposed headlines giving the main events that happened during that time period. Finally, the montage ends, and the action resumes.

Just as an associative sequence can also be linear, a montage sequence can have features of the linear and the associative sequence. A montage sequence compressing a decade into ten seconds could be linear in its chronological arrangement. The World War II montage was common in films of the 1940s. First, one would see a headline announcing the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, then subsequent headlines would enumerate key battles, and the last headline would proclaim the Japanese surrender.

A montage can also be unified by images. For example, the tour-of-Washington montage in Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) combines shots of the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument,

the Lincoln Memorial, and excerpts from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and the Gettysburg Address, all of which are associated with the spirit of American democracy.

## FROM SHOT TO SHOT

### Cuts

*Cut* is one of the most commonly used terms in film. It can be a verb a director shouts to terminate a shot ("Cut!") or a noun meaning a strip of film or a joint between two separate shots. It can also be a version of a movie in its various stages (rough cut, director's cut, final cut). In the context of this chapter, a cut is the joining of two separate shots so that the first is instantaneously replaced by the second, showing something the preceding shot did not. There are five basic kinds of cuts: straight, contrast, parallel (cross), jump, and form.

In a straight cut, one image instantaneously replaces another. Straight cuts are the most common kind of cuts: shot B replaces shot A. In *The Lady Eve* (1941), Preston Sturges cuts from Charlie Pike (Henry Fonda) sitting at a table in a ship's dining room (shot A) to a group of women staring in his direction (shot B). In a contrast cut, the images replacing each other are dissimilar in nature; for example, the cut from the manacled feet of slaves to the galloping hooves of horses in *Slaves* (1969) contrasts the enslaved and the free.

The parallel cut, or crosscut, presents two actions occurring simultaneously. In *Saboteur*, an attempt to sabotage a battleship at a christening in the Brooklyn Navy Yard is crosscut with the ceremony itself. In *Moonstruck* (1987), a mother is having dinner with a university professor, while her daughter is at the Metropolitan Opera with her lover. *King and Country* (1964) includes two actions that are crosscut: the mock trial of a rat the soldiers are staging in the rain, and the actual trial of a deserter that is being conducted in the barracks. Thus, the plight of the soldier is equated with the plight of the rat. Both the soldier and the rat are victims—the former of a dubious military code and the latter of the soldiers' cruelty, which stems from boredom.

A break in continuity that leaves a gap in the action constitutes a jump cut. In *Darling* (1965), a shot of a couple about twenty yards from the entrance to a building is followed by a shot of them going through the door to the interior of the building. Obviously not everything has to be shown in a particular scene or sequence, but excessive jump-cutting can give a film the continuity of a comic strip. On the other hand, when a knowledgeable director jump-cuts, there is probably a reason. In Jean-Luc Godard's

*Breathless* (1959), the main character shoots a police officer in Marseilles, runs across a field, and emerges in Paris. Godard is too talented a filmmaker to break continuity without a reason. *Breathless* is the kind of movie that calls attention to itself as a movie: It is dedicated to Monogram Pictures, which produced low-budget films during the 1930s and 1940s, and recreates the style of the low-budget American film in which a character can move from one location to the other without being seen in transit.

A form cut is a cut from one object to another that is similarly shaped. In *Detour*, there is a cut from a record in a jukebox to a drum-head—one circular object replaces another. Similar in principle to the form cut is the match cut, in which one shot "matches" the other, following it so smoothly that there is no break in continuity. Often a match cut is similar in shape to the shot it matches, although it need not be. In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), Steven Spielberg uses a match cut to bring Indiana from youth to adulthood. In the first shot, Indiana, the boy (River Phoenix), bows his head to receive the famous hat; as the head lifts in the second shot, the hat is now worn by Indiana, the man (Harrison Ford). Probably the most famous match in film is the one in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) when an ape hurls a bone into the air in one shot, and a space station in orbit appears in the next. The match condenses the history of evolution into two images.

### Transitions

In a cut there is no bridge between shots; one shot simply replaces another. Just as writers use transitional phrases (*however, moreover, in fact*) to bridge ideas, filmmakers use transitional devices to bridge scenes. And just as one can spot transitional phrases, one can also spot transitional devices in film because they are more noticeable than cuts. The following are the chief transitional devices in film.

#### The Fade

The fade-out is the simplest kind of transition: the light decreases, and the screen goes dark. The opposite is the fade-in, where the light increases as the picture gradually appears on the screen. (The term *fade* generally refers to a fade-out.) Most fade-outs are no more profound than a blank screen, but some can bring an action to an artful close much the way a gifted orator rounds out a sentence. A good illustration is the first fade-out in William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* (1942). The first sequence covers a day in the lives of the Minivers. Husband and wife feel guilty for having purchased something the other might find frivolous: Kay (Greer Garson) has bought a new hat, and Clem (Walter Pidgeon) a new car. At the close of



Harry Devlin as the uninvited guest at Alicia's (Ingrid Bergman) party in *Notorious*. Hitchcock will fade out on the back of Grant's head and fade in on his face. (Courtesy ABC Picture Holdings, Inc.)

the day, the camera pans the bedroom, pausing at the hat smartly perched on the bedpost. The scene fades out with the hat in silhouette. Fading out on the hat brings the sequence full circle: it began with Kay's buying the hat and ends with its being displayed. We smile at the fade because it provides the same pleasure of recognition we receive when a speech begins and ends with the same image. But we also smile at its wisdom, for it represents one of those little domestic triumphs that seems more meaningful at the end of the day than at the beginning.

In the theater, the curtain sometimes descends between the scenes of an act to mark the passage of time. In film, a fade can function in the same way. The first fade in *Notorious* occurs at a particularly dramatic moment. There is an unidentified guest at Alicia's party, sitting with his back to the camera. Curiously, he remains after everyone leaves. Hitchcock fades out on the back of the man and fades in on his face, which is none other than Cary Grant's. Hitchcock interrupts the party with a fade to indicate a lapse of time; but the fade is also a clever way of introducing the male lead by linking two scenes in which he appears—one ending with his back to the camera, the other beginning with his face coming into view. The fade produces a more natural rhythm than would be the case if Hitchcock had cut from the back of Grant's head to a close-up of his face.

A fade can also be commentative. In *Mr. Skeffington* (1944), the aging Fanny Skeffington (Bette Davis) reassembles her former suitors, who are

now either married or balding. The scene fades out as the men enter the dining room and fades in on a gentleman's hat and gloves. A cut would spoil the mood, which is one of genteel hypocrisy. The hat and gloves belong to Edward (Jerome Cowan), an impoverished suitor who has returned to court Fanny. The fade-out allows us to see a connection between the two scenes. In the first, Fanny has invited her suitors to dinner to reassure herself that she is still beautiful. However, Edward is not interested in her beauty, which is nonexistent, but only in her money, also nonexistent although he does not know it. One charade fades out and another fades in. A cut would have been too abrupt, and it would also not have conveyed the idea of one farce rising out of another.

## The Dissolve

A fade denotes demarcation—it indicates the end of a narrative sequence. A dissolve denotes continuity by the gradual replacement of one shot by another. This kind of transition, in which the outgoing and incoming shots merge, serves a variety of functions. Sometimes a dissolve simply has the force of “in the meantime” or “later.” In *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock dissolves a shot of Roger Thornhill bribing his mother to get a key from the desk clerk at a hotel to a shot of the two of them walking down the corridor toward the room Thornhill was so anxious to enter.

A dissolve can also mean “no sooner said than done.” The Mother Superior in *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) no sooner asks to see Bernadette than the shot dissolves into Bernadette's room. In Max Ophüls's *Caught* (1948), a shot of a woman gazing at a picture of a model in a mink coat dissolves into a shot of the woman, who has become a model herself, wearing a mink.

When is a dissolve a transition and when is it more than a transition? This is like asking when a word is simply a conventional sign and when it is a symbol. Water can simply be a liquid, or it can be a sign of birth, rebirth, or fertility. It depends on the context: in T. S. Eliot's poems, water is never just water. It is the same with a dissolve. What a dissolve means—if, in fact, it means anything—is determined by the context. The dissolve in *North by Northwest* was just a way of getting two characters from the hotel lobby to one of the floors.

When two images blend in such a way that their union constitutes a symbolic equation, however, the result is a metaphorical dissolve. This is a visual form of synecdoche (or metonymy, with which synecdoche is very similar), a species of metaphor in which the part is substituted for the whole (roofs for houses, sail for ships) or a sign for the thing signified (green = Go, crown = royalty). We often use this figure of speech without knowing it: “Give us this day our daily *bread*” (bread = food); “All *hands* on

deck" (hands = crew); "He addressed his comments to the *chair*" (chair = chairperson).

In *The Two Mrs. Carrrolls* (1947), Geoffrey Carroll (Humphrey Bogart) is a wife poisoner. Early in the film, Sally (Barbara Stanwyck) discovers a letter he dropped, addressed to his wife. Because Sally is in love with Geoffrey, she questions him about his marriage. He replies that he is getting a divorce. The letter dissolves into a neatly wrapped package of poison Geoffrey has just purchased from a pharmacist. The merging of the two images, the letter and the package, results in the equation: Mrs. Carroll + package = death. Dissolving an envelope bearing a woman's name into the means that will make her only a name is an ingenious touch.

The dissolves in George Stevens's films have an effect similar to the homogenization of cream and milk. In *Shane*, when Starrett (Van Heflin) and Shane (Alan Ladd) succeed in uprooting a stubborn tree trunk, Stevens slowly merges their triumphant faces into the landscape, making the men one with nature. Later, when Starrett watches a homesteader's property go up in flames, Stevens dissolves his vengeful face into the burning house. The resulting equation—man + nature = natural man; face + burning house = consuming rage—do not advance the plot; their purpose, rather, is to illustrate one of the film's main themes: the pioneer's oneness with nature, which enables him to become part of everything he sees or does.

A dissolve can sometimes have the effect of dramatic foreshadowing if the filmmaker prepares the audience for subsequent events by hinting at their outcome earlier. In *King and Country*, a skull mired in mud dissolves into the face of a soldier playing a harmonica. The dissolve prefigures the fate of the soldier, who later dies in the mud, his voice silenced by a pistol shot in the mouth.

Just as dissolves foreshadow, so can they recapitulate. At the end of *The Last Picture Show*, Sonny (Timothy Bottoms) returns to the house of Ruth Popper (Cloris Leachman), the coach's wife, with whom he has been having an affair. The movie house has closed its doors forever; Sam the Lion and Billy are dead; Duane is on his way to Korea. All that remain are Ruth and the dreary Texas town where the tumbleweed rolls down the main street. As Sonny and Ruth look at each other, their eyes forge the only bond that can unite them—loneliness. At that moment, Sonny and Ruth dissolve into the town and the vast Texas flatlands. There is no difference between a young man without prospects, a middle-aged woman without hope, and a town without a future. Their destinies have become one.

At the end of *Colorado Territory* (1949), Raoul Walsh's western remake of his earlier success, *High Sierra* (1941), the hands of Wes (Joel McCrea) and Colorado (Virginia Mayo), touching in death, dissolve into a shot of a ringing bell. The dissolve does not so much connect two images as two events that the lovers' hands and the bell represent. Earlier in the

film, Wes had hidden some stolen money in an abandoned church. After the deaths of Wes and Colorado, a priest discovers the money and uses it to restore the church bell, telling the villagers it was the gift of two lovers who passed by.

## The Form Dissolve

A filmmaker can merge two images with the same shape or contours through a form dissolve. Often a form dissolve is merely easy on the eyes. For example, in *Jane Eyre* the figure of a ballerina on top of a music box dissolves into a little girl dressed in the same costume. A form dissolve can also be directly related to the plot. In Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*, a jazz musician is falsely accused of committing a holdup. As the musician (Henry Fonda) prays in front of a picture of Jesus Christ, the scene gradually changes to that of a man walking down a dark street. Then the man's head merges with the musician's, which in turn becomes hollow enough to accommodate the other's face. The man whose head fits into the musician's is the real criminal. The dissolve shows how easy it is to mistake the innocent for the guilty; it is just a matter of superimposing one face upon another.

## The Wipe

Some television news programs change news items by means of a line traveling vertically across the screen. That traveling line is a wipe, and in the 1930s and the 1940s this device was the most stylish of the transitions. Since the screen is rectangular, the wipe can move vertically, horizontally, or diagonally; it can create a theatrical effect by rising or falling like a drop curtain, as it does in a scene in *The Thin Man*, where it moves from the bottom of the screen to the top, revealing a stage full of dancers.

Sometimes wipes complement each other: One shot ends with a wipe that travels from left to right; the next with a wipe that moves across the screen from right to left. The best example of complementary wipes can be found in the opening of *The Petty Girl* (1950).

More fluid than a cut and faster than a dissolve, the wipe is ideal for presenting a series of events in quick succession. Frank Capra, a frequent user of the wipe, employed it in the opening sequences of *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. In the handwriting sequence in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, for example, one expert after another testifies to the authenticity of Jeff Smith's signature. After each expert speaks, Capra simply "wipes" him off the screen, thereby showing the inanity of the investigation.

Rouben Mamoulian's excellent use of the wipe is apparent in *Dr.*

*Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* After Jekyll (Fredric March) becomes Hyde, he goes off into the night, deserting Muriel Carew (Rose Hobart), his fiancée, who expects him at her dinner party. A wipe opens like a fan, dividing the screen diagonally: on the left is the departing Jekyll; on the right, the party in progress. When Jekyll leaves the Carew estate, Mamoulian wipes him out of the frame, which expands to disclose the dinner guests and the worried Muriel. At that point, the frame divides diagonally again: on the right is Ivy (Miriam Hopkins), the woman Hyde will kill, sipping champagne; on the left is Muriel, the woman Jekyll yearns to marry. The wipe acts as a parallel cut, informing us that while Muriel was at her party, Ivy was at home. But the split screen also represents the protagonist's ideal woman, who is similarly halved. It is only fitting that for a double man (Jekyll/Hyde) there should be a double woman (Ivy/Muriel).

When Muriel's father, furious at Jekyll's absence, cries, "Muriel, you will have nothing more to do with that man," a wipe begins to move him from the left of the screen to the center, revealing the "man" himself. However, it is not Jekyll but Hyde whom we see. The wipe is an ironic commentary on the father's outburst; clearly, he did not mean that Muriel should have nothing to do with Hyde (whom he cannot know) but with Jekyll. At this point, however, Jekyll is Hyde.

Some writers compare the wipe to a windshield wiper. Hitchcock uses it as such in *Rebecca*, when the second Mrs. de Winter sees Manderley for the first time through the windshield as the wipers clear away the rain. He repeats the technique in *Psycho*: as Marion drives in the rain, the sign for the Bates Motel materializes on her windshield. In each film, the wipe introduces a new phase of the character's life by bringing the future before the character's eyes. In Mrs. de Winter's case, it was the house where she learned the truth about Rebecca, her husband's first wife; in Marion's, it was the motel where she met her death.

## The Iris

Mt. Rushmore as seen through a telescope in *North by Northwest* appears inside a circle in the middle of the darkened screen. This is a masking shot, or, to be more accurate, an iris shot, in which everything is blacked out except for what is to be seen telescopically. The frame can also be altered to simulate other shapes (e.g., the view from a keyhole, a crack in a door, binoculars, a submarine periscope) depending upon the form in which the director wants the audience to see the image.

In addition to the iris shot, there is what is known as iris-ing in and iris-ing out. Iris-ing in consists of opening up the darkened frame with a circle of light that keeps expanding until the picture fills the frame. Iris-ing out is the opposite; it is as if darkness were seeping into the frame from all

A frame enlargement of an iris shot from *The Birth of a Nation*. In an iris shot, the image appears within a circle on an otherwise dark screen. (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Epoch Producing Corp.)



sides, forcing the diminishing picture into some part of the frame until it becomes a speck and disappears.

A director can dolly in or out of a scene or, today, zoom in or out of one; but there is nothing quite like an iris to open the frame. In *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith used the iris breathtakingly in Sherman's March to the Sea. The frame opens from the upper-left-hand corner to reveal a mother

and her children on a hill; at first we do not know why they are huddled in fear, but as the frame opens we see Sherman's soldiers in the valley below. In *Intolerance*, Griffith gradually disclosed the splendor of Babylon by expanding the frame, starting at the lower-right-hand corner.

The iris is especially effective in death scenes. Lucy of *Broken Blossoms* and the Mountain Girl of *Intolerance* both die in iris. Irising out can suggest death because of the way in which darkness creeps into the frame, reducing the size of the image to a pinpoint and then annihilating it. Orson Welles chose the iris to symbolize both the death of Wilbur Minafer and the end of the horse and buggy era in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). A horseless carriage moves in long shot across the snow. The passengers sing merrily, but their song is in sharp contrast to the landscape, which is dominated by a dead tree with wiry branches. As the motor buggy moves out of frame, Welles starts iris-ing out until it disappears in the darkness that floods the screen. Welles iris-es out into a fade. One would have expected him to iris out of one scene and into another, but the shot that follows the fade is of a black wreath on the door of the Amberson house. The iris and the fade imply finality in different ways—the iris gradually and poetically, the fade irrevocably.

The principle of the iris unifies the flashbacks in George Stevens's *Penny Serenade* (1941). Julie (Irene Dunne) recalls incidents from her marriage by playing recordings of popular songs that had meaning for her and her husband. Each flashback begins with a close-up of the center of the disc, which then opens up, irislike, to reveal the scene.

Because of their fondness for the movies of the past, both François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard used the iris more readily than did many of their peers. Truffaut iris-es out repeatedly in *The Wild Child* to make the scenes resemble the stages of a scientific experiment conducted as dispassionately as possible. Godard uses the iris for sheer nostalgia in *Breathless*. In one scene, he iris-es out on Michel gazing idolatrously at a poster of Humphrey Bogart in his last film. One is tempted to say that Godard is iris-ing out on the old Hollywood—except that iris-ing is still being practiced, although not as regularly as it was in Griffith's day or during the 1930s and the 1940s. However, we do find iris-ing on certain television programs and in movies where techniques of the past function as period touches. When George Roy Hill iris-es out on the two con men at the close of *The Sting* (1973), it gives the ending a deliberately old-fashioned look. Similarly, Peter Bogdanovich's use of iris-ing in *Nickelodeon* lends an air of authenticity to the film, which is set in the early days of the movie industry.

Contemporary filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese, who are also immersed in films of the past, understandably use the techniques of the past. They use wipes, iris-es, and

fades both because they respect these techniques as vestiges of a past they admire and because those techniques can still be effective narrative devices. Brian De Palma uses the fade as a sign of demarcation at the beginning of *Dressed to Kill* (1980) when he fades to white after Kate's sexual fantasy. Steven Spielberg fades to black in *Empire of the Sun* to indicate that the first part of the action is over. Francis Ford Coppola uses a wipe in *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986) to take Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner) from high school, where she is talking with a male student, to her bedroom, where she is talking with her girlfriends. Scorsese uses two iris shots in *The Age of Innocence*—one of May's unusual engagement ring, an emerald in a diamond setting; the other of Newland and the countess at the opera, either to suggest intimacy by placing them within a circle of privacy or to imply that they may have come within the range of some gossip's opera glasses. Wipes and iris-es abound in the Star Wars trilogy, which evoke the old movie serials where wipes and iris-es were common. Here they have the double function of evoking nostalgia and promoting the narrative. Alan Alda ends *Sweet Liberty* with a variation on the iris out; the image does not narrow into a circle but into a rectangle that grows progressively smaller until it disappears. As more film disciples go on to become filmmakers, their work will reflect what they have learned and what they have seen.

## ASSEMBLING THE SHOTS

When Alfred Hitchcock said that a film must be edited, he meant that the shots making up the movie had to be assembled and arranged in such a way that the action proceeds in a logical and coherent manner. Editing involves selecting and arranging the shots based on the following considerations: their place within the narrative, their contribution to the mood of a particular scene or to the film as a whole, their enhancement of the film's rhythm, their elucidation of the film's deeper meaning, and their fulfillment of the filmmaker's purpose.

The most common form of editing in the narrative film is continuity editing, which entails assembling shots so that they follow each other smoothly and without interruption, as opposed to the piecemeal way in which a movie is filmed. Although movies are shot out of sequence (with location filming usually done before soundstage filming, and scenes involving actors with other commitments shot when the actors are available), filmgoers do not care which scenes were shot first or that the climax in the Grand Canyon was shot on the second day of shooting because the weather happened to be ideal. Continuity editing preserves the illusion of an ongoing narrative.



## Eisenstein's Theory of Montage

While *montage* is sometimes used as a synonym for *editing* (e.g., montage and American montage sequences), it had deeper implications for the great Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who believed that shots should not so much connect as collide, and that the viewer should be affected by their collision. Thus, montage calls attention to itself, unlike continuity editing, which is supposed to be unobtrusive. If a man postures like a peacock, cut from the man to the peacock; if he is figuratively a horse's ass, pair him with a real one. If the purpose of a scene is to show people being killed like animals, cut from workers being massacred to an ox being slaughtered. If one wishes to state visually that all wars waged in the name of God are immoral, arrange a series of shots starting with a baroque Christ and ending with an idol, thereby making militarism a form of regression. This is the kind of montage that Eisenstein practiced.

Eisensteinian montage is based on contrast and conflict, which can exist both within the film as a whole and within a particular shot or scene. In the Odessa steps massacre in Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, a body lies diagonally across the steps; the Cossacks cast shadows that fall menacingly at oblique angles to the steps; the steps form three contrasting planes, with the Cossacks at the top firing at a woman on a landing behind which lies a trail of bodies.

Eisenstein discovered how ideas could arise from the contrast and conflict of images. Without creating an actual series of cause and effect, he opened *Potemkin* with a shot of breaking waves and followed this image of turbulence with shots of men sleeping in hammocks that formed a shroud-like tangle, mess tables swinging back and forth, meat crawling with maggots—each image jarring us, disquieting us, but ultimately preparing us for the sailors' revolt.

Eisenstein's influence was enormous but not always beneficial. Instead of producing an artistic effect, sometimes the collision of images produced only pretentiousness. There is an embarrassing scene in Mamoulian's otherwise excellent *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* when Jekyll, exulting over his impending marriage to Muriel, cries, "If music be the food of love, play on!" as he sits down at the organ and pounds away. Five shots appear in rapid succession, commenting on his rapture: a lighted candelabra, an illuminated art object, a smiling statue, the butler's beaming countenance, and a blazing hearth. Jekyll's rapture is evident from the way he plays the organ; the accompanying montage is superfluous.

To Eisenstein, *montage* meant the visual conflict of images. On the Continent, it means editing: selecting and editing the shots that will form the scenes and sequences of the film. In England, the same process is called *editing*, or *cutting*, but with a slight difference: *editing* means the step-by-

step assembling of the shots in the cutting room, while *montage* refers to the process considered as a whole. A further complication is that, during the 1930s and 1940s, American films employed what has become known as *American montage*, which, as we have already seen, is a convenient way of collapsing time. In a typical American montage scene, newspapers would spin across the screen announcing a murder trial as one headline obliterates the other. The face of the judge would dissolve into the defendant's; during the trial, one shot would wipe away another. Superimposed over the defendant's face would be that of his anguished wife, and over hers, the face of the real murderer, who is hiding out in a sleazy room above a bar. Although this form of montage, in which time is telescoped through a blend of dissolves, wipes, and superimposures, is not in vogue today, in its time it was highly effective and was regarded as sufficiently important to warrant screen credit for the montage editor. Slavko Vorkapich was especially adept at montage (*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*), and Don Siegel began in montage at Warner Brothers before going on to become a well-known director (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956; *Dirty Harry*, 1971; *Escape from Alcatraz*, 1979 and so on).

## Continuity Editing

While montage may seem to be more exciting intellectually than continuity editing, it would be a mistake to dismiss continuity editing as merely the sequential arrangement of shots. Continuity editing is based on other editing principles that affect a film's rhythm, time, space, tone, and theme.

### Rhythm

No great film is rhythmically uniform. Some shots remain on the screen longer than others; some sequences move more rapidly than others. One sequence may be uncommonly slow, while another may be unusually fast. The best filmmakers vary speed, movement, and pace, knowing that long strips of film produce a slower rhythm, short strips a more rapid rhythm. The process itself is not the issue here; the effects are, as one can see in the first two sequences of *Citizen Kane*, "The Death of Kane" and "News on the March."

The film begins with the camera ascending the gate of Xanadu, defying the No Trespassing sign. A series of dreamlike dissolves culminates in a shot of a lighted window that suddenly goes dark. A mouth utters "Rosebud!" through a veil of falling snow, and a glass paperweight with a snow-covered house inside it smashes without making a sound. A nurse enters a room and folds a dead man's arms across his chest. The mood of the first part of "The Death of Kane" is slow and languid. As the camera





FROM THE DEATH OF KANE IN *CITIZEN KANE*

Frame enlargement of the glass paperweight that falls from Kane's hand. The lighted window of Kane's bedroom goes dark. Suddenly snow begins to fall; it is the artificial snow in the glass paperweight that falls from Kane's hand as he utters his last word, "Rosebud!" (Courtesy MOMA/FSA)

draws closer to the window, the rhythm accelerates. Snow falls to the sound of crystal-pure music, evoking Kane's Colorado boyhood. The paperweight breaks, and the nurse enters. Then the rhythm decelerates, and the mood becomes solemn as she places Kane's arms on his chest.

Without warning, a voice bellows "News on the march!" as a newsreel of Kane's life unfolds. In the second scene the pace is frenetic; fifty years of a man's life are compressed into a few minutes. The pace builds inexorably until the "News on the March" is over and the camera sputters out, as if in exhaustion.

## Time

Parallel cutting makes it possible for two concurrent actions to be depicted on the screen without one's being completed before the other begins—the filmmaker simply cuts back and forth between them. Most novelists would never narrate two simultaneous episodes by completing the first before going on to the second; the novelist would bring the first to a certain point and, leaving the reader in suspense, proceed to the second. The novelist would then gradually add to each episode until the episodes are resolved either separately or jointly. D. W. Griffith understood this principle when

As the nurse enters Kane's room, her image is refracted through a piece of the shattered paperweight. (Courtesy MOMA/FSA)



he made *The Lonely Villa* (1909), in which he cut back and forth between a mother and her daughters being terrorized by thieves who have broken into their home, and the father en route to rescue them. The action is resolved by the last-minute rescue.

## Space

Film's ability to alter our perception of space is well known. A filmmaker can combine a shot of a tractor trailer that has jackknifed on the New England Thruway with a shot of a girl who has just gotten off the Cyclone at Coney Island, looking appropriately dazed. The combination could lead one to conclude that the girl witnessed the jackknifing even though one event occurred outside of Boston and the other took place in Brooklyn.

D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* is a four-plot film about the theme of injustice as seen in four different periods: the early twentieth century, the time of Cyrus the Great (sixth century B.C.), the time of Christ, and the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of the Huguenots in 1572. Although the film depicts events in four different parts of the world, at the climax everything seems to be occurring within the same location. By alternating between shots of Christ proceeding toward Calvary, the mountain girl in her chariot on her way to warn Cyrus, the car's attempt to catch up with a train to prevent an innocent man from being executed, and Prosper the Huguenot rushing through the streets of sixteenth-century Paris to rescue his beloved, Griffith makes it seem that all of these events are occurring not only at the same time but also in the same general area. The parallel cutting has affected our sense of space as well as time. It also suits the film's theme: the existence of intolerance at all times and in all places.

Morphing—a computer-graphics effect that allows the filmmaker to create a situation in which, say, a movie character interacts with a historical figure—might seem to challenge our perception of film space. The re-

sult, virtual reality, is, like any innovation, a novelty when first seen. It worked well in *Forrest Gump*, in which Forrest is seen interacting with Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, and John Lennon of the Beatles. The reason is that Forrest, who gave every indication of being one of life's losers, eventually triumphs, achieving a familiar version of the American dream: going from obscurity to fame. However, the danger is that once audiences catch onto the device, they will dismiss it as a gimmick. The extent to which morphing can engage audiences depends upon how intelligently it is handled. Far more realistic is the digital placement of an actor in a disaster scene. First, the actor is photographed at the site; then the disaster is photographed; finally, the actor is situated digitally in the scene. Despite the perennial interest in special effects, they can only be a means to an end; if the end is to falsify reality, mock history, or compensate for a mediocre script that is devoid of human emotions, special effects are the equivalent of trick photography: gimmickry, not art.

## Tone

Just as tempo should vary in a film, so too should tone, which is primarily light, shade, and color. Again, *Kane* is an excellent example. The first sequence, "The Death of Kane," is dark and eerie. The second sequence, "News on the March," is the exact opposite; it is a newsreel, and looks as grainy as any newsreel ever made.

## Theme

A filmmaker might deepen a film's theme by juxtaposing contrasting shots. As we have seen, there is a cut in *Slaves* from the manacled feet of slaves to the galloping hooves of horses. Whether the horses are in the same vicinity as the slaves is irrelevant; the point of the cut is the contrast between the enslaved and the free. In *A Doll's House* (1973), there is a cut from Nora's upper-middle-class home to Krogstad's hovel; seeing how Krogstad lives makes it easier to understand his blackmailing Nora.

## The Role of the Editor

Since it is a common fallacy that films are made in the editing room, students often have difficulty distinguishing between the editor's role and the filmmaker's. We have seen that editing involves selecting and arranging the shots in a particular order. But who does the arranging, the editor or the filmmaker?

Let us use an analogy from student life. After you have written an essay or a term paper, you submit it to your instructor. Even before sub-

mitting it, you have edited it: removed superfluous words, substituted the right words for the wrong ones, corrected spelling and grammar. Still, your essay may not be perfect; you have been too close to it to catch all the mistakes. Since your instructor has not written it, he or she can be more objective. You may have sentences, or even paragraphs, that should be transposed. What you thought was an introduction might work better if you made it your conclusion. Perhaps you did not prune the paper of all its excesses; your instructor will note that. A good instructor can take what you have submitted and, by making the proper corrections and suggestions, show you how it can be improved. Your instructor did not write the paper, yet he or she has done something for it that you could not do: your instructor has made it better.

An editor performs a similar task: an editor takes what has been shot and improves upon it. The ideal film editor is the director's alter ego, carrying out what the director would do if he or she had the time to be all things to the film. Thus, an editor may select the shots or decide which portion of a shot should be used. An editor can give an action scene its distinctive rhythm by alternating tempo and varying directional movement. If a sequence needs greater momentum, an editor can cut it in such a way that it acquires it. If a scene is especially violent, an editor can cut it so rapidly that the movie will receive a PG-13 instead of an R rating. If shot A shows the cavalry pursuing the Indians left to right, shot B must show the Indians fleeing left to right; otherwise, it would look as if the cavalry and the Indians collided. If a character exits shot A from the left, the character must enter shot B from the right.

Because all films require some form of editing, the importance of editors has often been exaggerated and their role sometimes equated with that of directors. Lee Bobker compares editors with painters, working in isolation to create the movie's pace, mood, and rhythm. Yet, despite Bobker's respect for the editor's function, he is forced to admit it is a subservient one: "The editor should always enjoy a wide creative latitude, but he should never fall prey to the illusion that he is creating a new film from scratch. His primary purpose is to bring to completion an artistic work already in progress."<sup>1</sup>

In the first edition of *The Technique of Film Editing*, Karel Reisz dubbed the editor "the interpreter of the small details rather than the prime creator of the continuity."<sup>2</sup> For the second edition, Professor Thorold Dickinson provided an introduction to the second part of the book in which he stated that "the modern editor is the executant for the film-maker and no longer his equal on any self-respecting film."<sup>3</sup>

Most good editors would agree. The best answer to the question "What is film editing?" was given by the British editor Anthony Gibbs: "Film editing is putting into dramatic form the basic filmed material

given to the editor by the director.”<sup>4</sup> However, just as there are average, good, and great directors, there are average, good, and great editors. Gibbs would call a good editor someone who can achieve “the total interpretation of the director’s and the writer’s intentions,” and a great editor as someone who is capable of “taking their intentions even farther, showing them a dimension to their project which even they may not have imagined to be there.”<sup>5</sup>

True greatness is rare in any profession; thus, great editors are probably at a premium. It is not unlikely that an editor capable of bringing to the surface what the filmmaker did not even know was there would go on to become a director. The motto of Edward Dmytryk, who began his career as an editor and then went on to direct some fifty films between 1935 and 1975, is relevant: “Substance first—then form.”<sup>6</sup> The filmmaker must provide the substance if the editor is to provide the form.

## COLORING THE IMAGE

### The Black-and-White Film

Film theorist Rudolph Arnheim has argued that color is accidental to film, and that audiences can accept the absence of color in black-and-white movies. The history of film proves that a movie photographed in black and white can render all of the important plot details without loss of verisimilitude. Just as sound films cannot be considered superior to silent films simply because the dialogue can be heard, color films cannot be considered superior to black and white because all the colors can be seen. Nor are black-and-white films that include references to color less effective because the color cannot be seen; the color can be imagined. In William Wyler’s *Jezebel* (1938), a black-and-white film, Julie (Bette Davis) arrives at a ball in a red dress that she has been forbidden to wear. The dress photographs as nonwhite, and white was the color Julie was expected to wear. Julie’s act of rebellion is as effective today, when color films are the norm, as it was in 1938, when color films were the exception.

One should always remember that it is only since the late 1960s that color has been the norm. Yet, even when black and white was the norm, filmmakers could work within the parameters of monochrome and achieve something akin to color. In *Twelve O’Clock High* (1949), Gregory Peck plays an Air Force general whose inflexibility results in a nervous breakdown. He tolerates no deviation from the rules—he might even be described as someone who thinks in “black and white.” When the general breaks down, the blackness of his hair and leather jacket and the stark whiteness of his face set against a translucent gray background imply that



The creative use of black and white in *The Merry Widow* (1934). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA)

the gray area in human affairs that lies between the extremes of black and white was something the general had relegated to the background. It was his inability to perceive shades of difference that led to his breakdown.

In Ernst Lubitsch’s *The Merry Widow* (1934), the black-and-white photography produces a color scheme that even the most advanced form of color technology would find hard to rival. Since the film is based on a Viennese operetta, everything looks as if it has come from a confectionery. It is impossible not to think of chocolate, icing, and whipped cream when watching the film: the widow’s mansion looks like a tiered wedding cake; her boudoir is like a pastry shell; the walls of her boudoir are creamy and incandescent. When the widow wears a black negligee, the dramatic contrast of her attire and the appointments of her boudoir satisfy whatever craving for color a viewer might have.

Although *Citizen Kane* was photographed in black and white, it is rich in color symbolism. Throughout the film, white is an ambivalent symbol. It suggests innocence as well as the loss of innocence; it is the color of

ing frames are selected, a computer applies the same colors throughout, varying the hues in terms of the lighting pattern in the original. Still, there is no guarantee that a color sketch provided for a black-and-white film would be valid if the studio had decided to shoot the film in color. Thus, the claim that a colorized version of a black-and-white film would have proved satisfactory if the filmmaker had the opportunity to shoot it in color is false.

The foes of colorization—and there have been many, including James Stewart, Burt Lancaster, Woody Allen, Frank Capra, and Martin Ritt—contend that colorization vitiates the principle of creative choice that is essential to art. When a studio chose to film a movie in black and white rather than color, that choice entailed several factors, the chief one being, no doubt, the cost. During Hollywood's golden age, there was no aesthetic policy that dictated what kinds of movies should be made in black and white as opposed to color. One cannot say, for example, that color is more suited to westerns than black and white since some of John Ford's classic westerns were photographed in black and white: *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine*, *Fort Apache* (1948), *Wagonmaster* (1950), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). Nor was color considered mandatory for musicals; the great musicals of the 1930s, notably those starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, were black and white. Color was expensive and was not lavished on every film, only on films that the studio deemed important enough to warrant it or on those that needed color to realize their dramatic potential to the fullest. *Gone with the Wind* was intended to be in color; another film set in the South and released the previous year, *Jezebel*, was not.

When the decision is made to shoot a film in color, everything—costumes, lighting, makeup, settings—is planned and executed in terms of that choice. That choice, however, was to shoot the film in a color *process* such as Technicolor, Trucolor, Warnercolor, and so on. Colorization is not a *color* process; it is a *computer-aided* process that, in the absence of any guiding intelligence, allows a computer to make the choices that should be the prerogative of the filmmaker.

## LIGHTING THE IMAGE

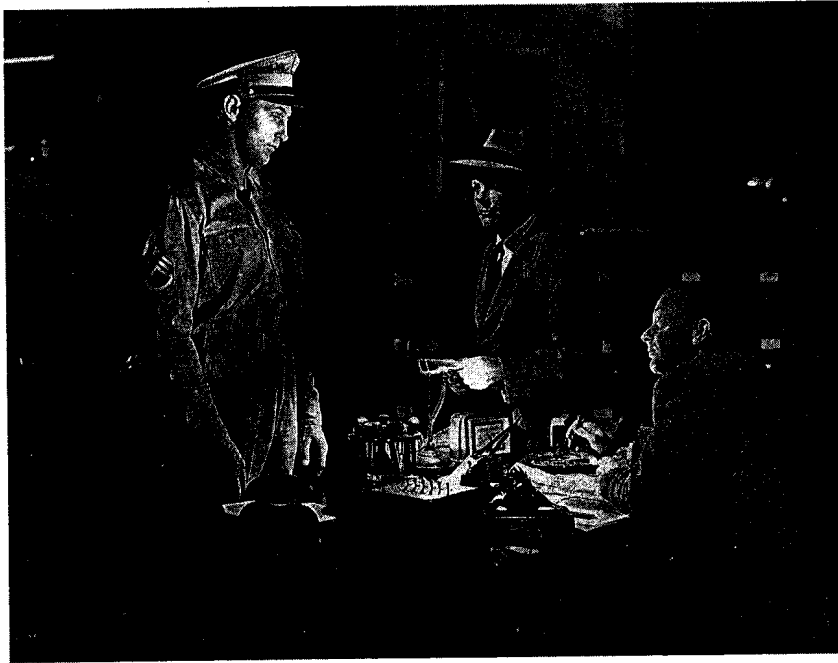
The classic Hollywood film is an example of three-point lighting—key, fill, and back lights used in combination to light the subject. These are not the only lights; still, three-point lighting is a standard lighting scheme that, if understood properly, explains how lighting can affect one's perception of a character or a setting.

The key light, the principal source of illumination, leaves shadows if



High-key lighting in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA)

it is used alone. Thus, another light is necessary to fill in the areas the key light has left unlit and to soften the shadows it has cast: the fill light, an auxiliary light of slightly less intensity placed at eye level. But even a combination of key and fill light is not sufficient if a sense of depth is desired. Hence, a back light, placed above and behind the subject, is required. The back light alone would produce merely a silhouette. But in combination with the key and fill lights, the back light separates the subject from its environment, thereby creating a feeling of depth.



Low-key lighting in *Crossfire* (1947). (Courtesy WCFTR)

In terms of effect, lighting can be categorized as high key and low key. A low-contrast ratio of key and fill light will result in an image of almost uniform brightness, or what is called *high-key lighting*, the kind used in musicals, comedies, and for scenes of tranquillity and peace. Conversely, a high-contrast ratio of key and fill light will result in *low-key lighting* and create a shadowy effect and a nighttime aura, often with intensely white faces against an onyx-black background. Directors of horror films, melodramas, and film noir (a type of melodrama where passions run high in urban settings that are grimy and often fogbound and where streets are dark, mean, and continually rain-slick) prefer low-key lighting for its shadows and its strong contrast of light and darkness.

In addition to these two general categories of lighting, there are five other types, distinguished by the angle from which the light source illuminates the subject: front, back, top, side, and bottom. Front lighting has a softening effect that makes whatever we are viewing seem more attractive than it actually is. Front lighting of the face creates an ageless look, but it also robs the face of character. Back lighting, as we have seen, adds



Back lighting in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). The back light is coming from a projector during the screening of a silent film starring Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), who, in the middle of it, stands up and with arm raised vows to return to the screen. (Courtesy WCFTR. Copyright © 1949, Paramount Pictures Corporations. All rights reserved.)

depth and brings out subtleties of design and pattern. When a character is backlit, as Esther (Barbra Streisand) is when she sings "Evergreen" at the end of *A Star Is Born* (1976), a halolike aura is produced that gives an ethereal quality. Similarly, top lighting creates an atmosphere of youthfulness or spirituality, as it does in *The Song of Bernadette*, where it emphasizes Bernadette's saintliness. Side lighting leaves the subject half in light, half in shadow; thus, it can denote a split personality, a morally ambiguous character, or a femme fatale. Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich were often photographed in this fashion. Bottom lighting gives the subject a sinister air; it was the kind of lighting D. W. Griffith employed in *Dream Street* (1921) to bring out the villainy of Sway Wan.

In a black-and-white film, the interplay of light and darkness can produce visual symbolism. Throughout *Citizen Kane*, Thompson, the reporter trying to decipher the meaning of Kane's dying word ("Rosebud!")

is always seen in shadow. He is literally in the dark, and remains in that state throughout the film. Just as darkness can denote ignorance, so light can intimate knowledge. When Thompson enters the Thatcher Memorial Library to read the memoirs of Kane's guardian, shafts of light illuminate the mausoleum-like room. Perhaps the memoirs will explain the meaning of "Rosebud." But the light is deceptive, and Thompson leaves the library as much in the dark as ever.

Thompson is not the only character who suffers from ignorance. Although Thompson is ignorant of the meaning of "Rosebud," Kane is ignorant of himself. When Kane delivers his Declaration of Principles, promising to be a "fighting and tireless champion" of the people, his face is in darkness. Kane does not know that he will never live up to his declaration, and the lighting states as much.

Lighting is also used effectively in Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels* (1941). In that film, some black parishioners invite the white prisoners of a local chain gang to their church to watch a movie. When we see the prisoners making their way to the church, they are in darkness; for a moment they look like black men. The lighting establishes a bond between the black congregation and the prisoners; it also reinforces the film's theme that moviegoing is a form of brotherhood that erases all distinctions, including racial ones. Movies are the great leveler; in the dark everyone is equal.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Lee R. Bobker, with Louise Marinis, *Making Movies: From Script to Screen* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 209.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Reisz and Gavin Miller, *The Technique of Film Editing*, 2nd ed. (New York: Focal Press, 1968), 84.

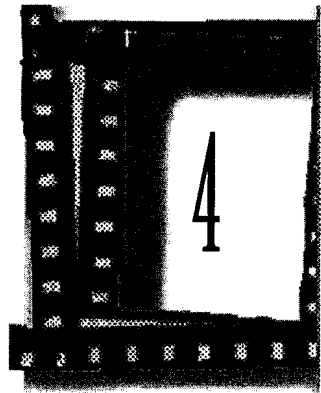
<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 277.

<sup>4</sup>"Film Editors Forum," *Film Comment* 13 (March–April 1977): 24.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Edward Dmytryk, *On Film Editing: An Introduction to the Art of Film Construction* (Boston: Focal Press, 1984), 145.

## CHAPTER



# Film Genres

So far we have been talking about techniques, using examples from such films as *My Darling Clementine*, *Detour*, and *Carrie*. While these films illustrate certain principles of moviemaking, they also illustrate certain types of films. Each of these films represents a particular genre: *Clementine*, the western; *Detour*, film noir; and *Carrie*, the horror film.

When English professors speak of a genre, they mean a literary form with certain conventions and patterns that, through repetition, have become so familiar that readers expect similar elements in works of the same type. In the Greece of the fifth century B.C. and Elizabethan England, the two great ages of tragedy, audiences attending a performance of *Oedipus the King* or *Hamlet* were not witnessing a wholly new dramatic form. The protagonist embarking on a quest that will result in his or her undoing was already a familiar one. Equally well established was the tragic progression from ignorance to self-knowledge, and from prosperity to catastrophe.

The conventions of tragedy (protagonist with a tragic flaw, fatal mis-

## Relating a Film to History

John Schlesinger's film of Nathanael West's novel *The Day of the Locust* has a historical subtext. West intended his novel as an anti-Hollywood tract, but it was also a subtle indictment of the political apathy that breeds moguls in the movie colony and dictators in the world at large. The 1975 film version followed a similar course. Nothing in the script's language implied that there was a political dimension to the plot. Therefore, Schlesinger had to supply that dimension visually; he had to show a Hollywood where life is a soundstage and where reality becomes illusion and remains so even as the armies of Europe are preparing for World War II. Sometimes Schlesinger's cutting is so abrupt that it blurs the distinction between the real and the illusory. For example, he cuts from a father calling his daughter to passengers waving from a ship. At first this is puzzling, until the ship is shown to be a soundstage prop whose passengers are movie extras.

The climax of the film is the brutal death of Homer Simpson (Donald Sutherland) on the night of a Hollywood premiere. Homer's death is a grim reminder of the price a nation pays when it turns inward upon its myths (where the dream is more glorious than the reality) and worships those who promise to make the dream come true. Schlesinger prepares us for the apocalypse earlier in the film with images of decay and perversity: a boy with platinum curls unsexed by his fame-hungry mother so he can look like Shirley Temple; a dead horse in a swimming pool; a death face peering into Homer's backyard; a bloody cockfight intercut with flashes of the gaudy dress Faye Greener (Karen Black) waves in front of Homer with a rhythm that matches, beat for beat, the quick jabs the roosters are giving each other.

The Hollywood depicted is an insular community that resents the intrusion of history and reality. Faye and her beaux leave the movie theater before the newsreel begins; having seen a film in which she had a bit part, Faye is uninterested in a newsreel about the rise of Hitler. On the night of the premiere, a newspaper blows down Hollywood Boulevard, its headlines announcing the advent of World War II. The master of ceremonies for the event is a Hitler look-alike, and the fans are the kind that would turn out for a premiere or a Nazi rally. Again Schlesinger crosscuts, this time between the premiere and the death of Homer. He is not crosscutting between illusion and reality but between two forms of madness, as in the cockfight/swirling dress scene.

In the climax, all the associations merge: political detachment, fascism, and the mob's need for a scapegoat. Adore, the boy who's too old for his feminine curls, strikes Homer in the head with a stone. In a rage, Homer pursues him into a parking lot and stomps him to death. His reac-

tion is our reaction: we want this unnatural product of a twisted dream destroyed before it grows up to be something worse. But the mob is so crazed by the sight of the gods and goddesses at the premiere that it turns on Homer and tears him apart. As Tod the art designer watches in horror, he envisions the fans as zombies with death-mask faces, American grotesques mobilized to kill the destroyer of the dream.

By crosscutting between the premiere and Homer's ritual dismemberment, Schlesinger creates associations that are implicit only in the script. In the text, the crowd destroys Homer because he kills Adore; in the subtext, it destroys him because he kills what Adore represents—the necessity of perverting one's nature to become a star. And if one must become dehumanized to be a star, one must do the same to worship the star; thus movie fans can be as grotesque as the objects of their worship, knocking down barricades to get a touch of mink or a piece of shirt. There is another motive for their behavior, a motive as old as the one that impelled the worshipers of Dionysus to kill the intruder who witnessed their sacred rites. Homer has wandered into a sacred ritual, the ritual of the Hollywood premiere; but Homer is also unclean from the blood of Adore. Thus, the fans turn on him because he has polluted their rites and shed the blood of one of their own.

A film, therefore, can be set in a particular era and yet evoke that era only indirectly. Such a film does not declare itself "historical" in the sense of dramatizing a historical event the way, for example, *Tora! Tora! Tora!* recreates the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Yet, to appreciate this kind of film, one has to know history; unlike the historical film, the script does not provide the information.

A knowledge of the Great Depression enables one to look at *It Happened One Night* as something more than just a screwball comedy. And yet it is not coincidental that screwball comedy was born in the Great Depression; its breeziness and happy endings offered escape and enjoyment to the beleaguered audiences of that era. This kind of comedy, in which social barriers crumbled like the walls of Jericho, was ideal for Depression audiences, who delighted in seeing a society woman put in her place by a man who didn't even wear an undershirt. *It Happened One Night* is pure fairy tale, a variation on "The Princess and the Commoner" set in the early 1930s. The associations we bring to the film—breadlines, soup kitchens, strikes—enable us to see it as a fable of the Great Depression.

*Easy Living*, another screwball comedy, is best remembered for the automat sequence in which Mary Smith, swathed in the sable that has literally dropped to her from the sky, is sitting by herself, eating a beef pie, completely oblivious to the fighting that goes on when the food suddenly becomes free. In the context of the film, the scene is uproarious; in the context of Depression America, the sight of people sliding on a food-covered



Cinderella in sable (Jean Arthur) is exposed to the grim realities of the Great Depression in the automat sequence of *Easy Living* (1937).  
(Copyright © by Paramount Pictures, Courtesy MCA Publishing Rights, a Division of MCA Inc.)

floor is disquieting. When the camera roams around the automat, observing a fur-clad Mary eating in the foreground with the masses fighting in the background, it does more than record a comic free-for-all. By highlighting the extremes of affluence and poverty, it defines the Great Depression as a time of sable for the lucky and rags for the luckless.

## ■ Relating a Film to Film History

Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) is ostensibly about a woman caught between two men, one of whom debases her while the other idealizes her. Bertolucci used this narrative structure to work out a theory of film that he illustrates with references to movies of the past. Thus, when Pauline Kael reviewed *Last Tango*, and alluded to the film's constant "feedback," she meant that much in the film—the performances as well as the imagery—recalled other films.

"Movies are a past we share, and, whether we recognize them or not, the copious associations are at work in the film and we feel them," Kael observed.<sup>8</sup> As we have already seen, the way a movie is cast can create certain associations between the actor and his or her role. In *Last Tango*, Marlon Brando plays Paul, an American in Paris, who meets Jeanne (Maria Schneider) when both of them show up to look at the same apartment; Jean-Pierre Léaud is Tom, the TV director and movie nut who is using Jeanne for a television film he is making. Brando and Léaud are not ordinary actors. Each epitomizes a style of acting and a type of film that revolutionized the cinema. Brando will always be synonymous with the Method, a system of acting that requires the performer to draw on past experiences, emotions, and memories for a particular role. Brando was the

definitive Method actor of the 1950s—brooding, introspective, often inarticulate. Léaud was the discovery of François Truffaut, who cast him as Antoine Doinel, the problem child of *The 400 Blows*. Léaud and Truffaut then went on to make other films: the "Antoine and Colette" episode in *Love at Twenty* (1962), *Stolen Kisses*, *Bed and Board* (1970), and *Day for Night* (1973). Physically, Léaud had even begun to resemble the director. Truffaut typifies the New Wave—that extraordinary burst of creativity that started in France at the end of the 1950s, when directors like Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard rejected literary scripts for shooting scripts and improvisation, filmed in the streets rather than in studios, demanded naturalistic acting instead of old-fashioned emoting, and quoted liberally from the movies of the past.

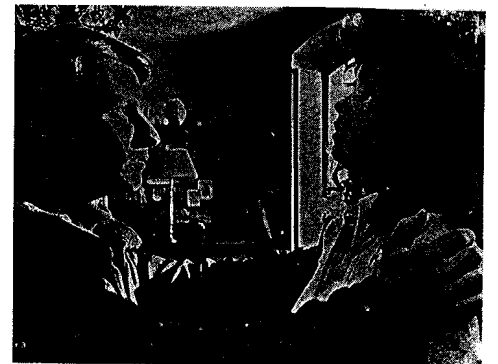
Just as Brando and Léaud represent two different eras of filmmaking, the characters they portray represent two different ways of life. Paul isolates himself in the apartment, where he works out his sexual aggression on Jeanne; Tom roams the streets of Paris, scouting for locations for his movie. Jeanne is trapped not just between two men but between their worlds: Paul's closed world of the apartment and Tom's open world of the

### ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN ACTOR AND ROLE

Jean-Pierre Léaud as Antoine Doinel in *The 400 Blows* (1959), perhaps the most famous of the New Wave films. (Courtesy Janus Films)



Léaud as Tom, the TV director in *Last Tango in Paris* (1973), with Maria Schneider. Even as Tom, Léaud typified the casual, naturalistic form of acting that the New Wave directors encouraged. (Courtesy United Artists)





city. Yet filmmakers are in the same predicament: Do they remain within the closed world of the studio set, as their predecessors did, or do they venture outside, where an entire city can be their soundstage?

What Kael calls "feedback" is not limited to the eras Brando and Léaud evoke. Bertolucci used *Last Tango* as a vehicle for his ideas on film in the same way Paul and Tom were using Jeanne for their respective purposes. Thus, in the film Bertolucci invokes movies of the past that have some bearing on his own film. When Jeanne and Tom are on a barge, there is a life preserver with *L'Atalante* inscribed on it. *L'Atalante* is the title of Jean Vigo's classic film (1934), and the barge scene in *Last Tango* pays homage to Vigo's exquisite production, in which a young bride leaves her barge captain-husband to experience the excitement of Paris, only to return to the secure world of the barge at the end. However, Bertolucci is also replying to Vigo's optimism: Vigo's bride can be reunited with her husband, but once Paul and Jeanne leave the apartment, no reunion is possible.

*Last Tango* is like a course in film history. The scene in which Paul looks out on the roofs of Paris before he dies recalls René Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris* (*Under the Roofs of Paris*, 1931), which the director made when he was thirty, the same age Bertolucci was when he made *Last Tango*. When Jeanne shoots Paul, the scene is not only a part of *Last Tango* but of all those Hollywood movies in which a woman pulls a revolver and pumps her lover full of bullets. *Last Tango* purports to be about male-female relationships, but subtextually it is about the relationship between filmmakers and their art.

With its mix of animation and live action, Robert Zemeckis's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), set in 1947, seems to have a double subtext: the animated cartoons of the 1930s and 1940s and the private-eye films of the 1940s. While *Roger Rabbit* has been enjoyed by children who have never seen a private-eye movie and who know cartoons only from television, it speaks most directly to those who have a knowledge of film history. The dancing hippos bring back memories of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940); Roger's sexy wife, Jessica, with her red tresses and low-cut gown, recalls Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (1946); Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins), the private eye hired to trail Jessica, whose infidelity is causing Roger to forget his lines, is a seedier version of the 1940s private detectives Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe.

However, the plot of *Roger Rabbit*—a detective's discovery of a scheme that would, if executed, change the face of Los Angeles—is not to be found in any cartoon or 1940s detective movie, but in one particular film, Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), the true subtext of *Roger Rabbit*. In *Chinatown*, the private investigator J. J. Gittes (Jack Nicholson) uncovers a shady land deal involving Noah Cross (John Huston), who is buying up property in the San Fernando Valley, where a projected reservoir will

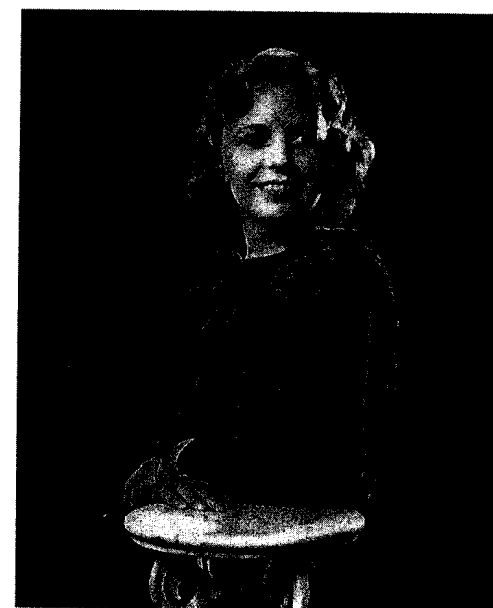
turn the area into choice real estate. In *Roger Rabbit*, Eddie Valiant discovers that Judge Doom (Christopher Lloyd) plans to transform Los Angeles from a city that relies on trolley cars for transportation into a city of freeways. To do so, he must destroy Toontown, the enclave in which the cartoon characters live. If he succeeds, he will be destroying a venerable film tradition: the animated cartoon and the characters, like Bugs Bunny, Donald Duck, and Porky Pig, who are part of it.

Judge Doom's plan is thwarted through the combined efforts of Eddie and the Toons. The actual history of Los Angeles and Hollywood, however, has proved otherwise. Thus, moviegoers who remember a time when theaters featured a cartoon, two movies, a newsreel, and a chapter of a serial find *Roger Rabbit* bittersweet: the film conjures up a Hollywood of another time and place—to many, perhaps a better time and place.

### Relating the Remake to the Original: *Sabrina Fair* (1953), *Sabrina* (1954), *Sabrina* (1995)

First there was Samuel Taylor's *Sabrina Fair*, a Broadway hit of the 1953–54 season. Paramount Pictures produced the film version, *Sabrina*, almost immediately; *Sabrina*'s popularity had as much to do with the script—coau-

Margaret Sullavan, who created the role of Sabrina Fairchild on Broadway in Samuel Taylor's *Sabrina Fair* (1953). (Courtesy Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences)



thored by Taylor, Ernest Lehman, and the film's director, Billy Wilder—as with Audrey Hepburn's performance in the title role. *Sabrina* was a variation of the Cinderella story in which a chauffeur's daughter, Sabrina Fairchild, finds her Prince Charming in the son of her father's employer, a shipping tycoon who lives on a Long Island estate. The 1995 remake followed the same narrative path; both versions are interesting examples of the way the same plot can be adapted to the era in which the film was made.

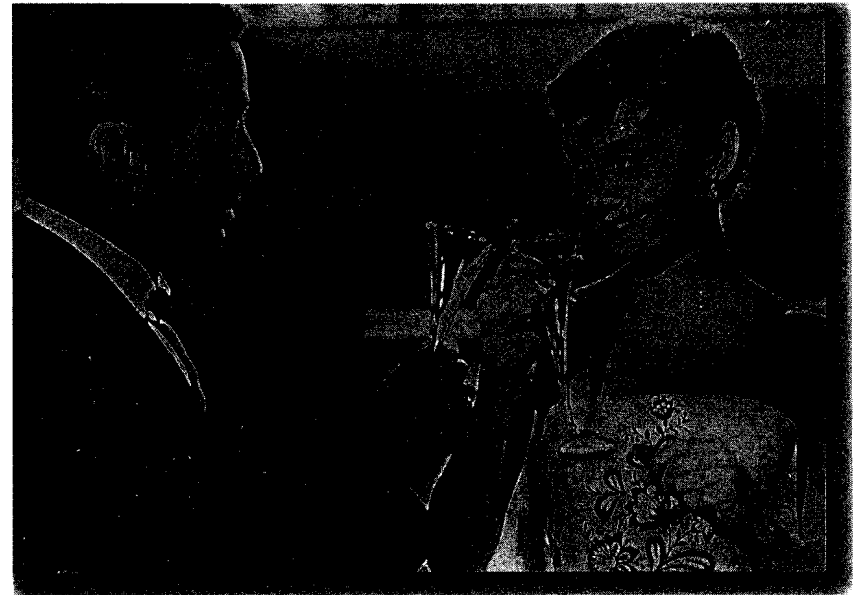
*Sabrina Fair* opened with a prologue spoken in semidarkness, beginning “Once upon a time.” Both film versions use a voice-over prologue with the same words, suggesting that what follows is a contemporary fairy tale.

In the play, Sabrina goes to Paris to work for the American government; since *Sabrina Fair* is a single-set play, her pre-Paris life is narrated, never dramatized.

The two film versions begin in much the same way: Sabrina is in a tree, observing a party that is in progress at the Larabees, for whom her father is the family chauffeur. In both versions, she is secretly in love with David Larabee, but Fairchild wants his daughter to learn a trade. Since, in the play, Sabrina had spent time in Paris, it makes sense to show her there rather than just have her talk about it. Thus, in the 1954 version Fairchild sends Sabrina (Audrey Hepburn) to Paris to study cooking; in the 1995 remake, Sabrina (Julia Ormond) leaves to work as a photographer's assistant at *Paris Vogue*. The change was in keeping with a 1995 audience's association of Paris with high fashion and also explains Sabrina's metamorphosis into a glamorous young woman.

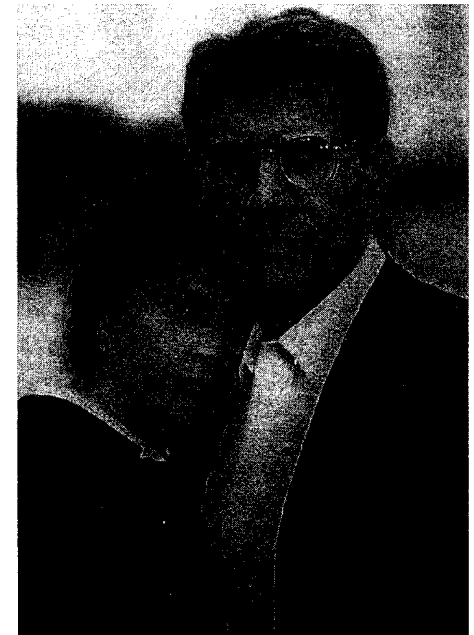
Another change occurred in the 1995 version regarding David's fiancée and her family's business. In the play, David was divorced; in Wilder's film, David (William Holden) is a playboy engaged to a sugar heiress. In the nutrition-conscious 1990s, no one would be impressed by anyone's marrying into a sugar dynasty. Moreover, a 1990s audience, aware of such media empires as Time Warner, Viacom, and ABC-Disney, would be more interested in a family that made its money in telecommunications. Thus, in the 1995 version David's fiancée belongs to a family whose telecommunications company David's brother, Linus (Harrison Ford), would like to merge with Larabee Communications.

There was a significant plot change in the 1954 version that was also reflected in the 1995 remake. Instead of following the play, in which Sabrina suddenly realizes that she loves David's brother, Linus, Wilder initially prejudices us against Linus. When Linus senses David's interest in Sabrina, he starts courting her himself—not out of love but to divert his brother's attention from her to the sugar heiress, who represents a more profitable match. But Linus soon succumbs to Sabrina's charm, and what began as a ruse ends in love. The new characterization worked because



Audrey Heburn as Sabrina and Humphrey Bogart as Linus in *Sabrina* (1954).  
(Courtesy Paramount Pictures and MOMA/FSA)

Julia Ormond as Sabrina and  
Harrison Ford as Linus in the 1995  
remake. (Courtesy Paramount  
Pictures and the Margaret Herrick  
Library of the Academy of Motion  
Picture Arts and Sciences)



Humphrey Bogart, who rarely played comedy, was cast as Linus. The audience, given its image of Bogart as the unsentimental "tough guy," was delighted when he fell under Sabrina's spell.

In the play and the 1954 film, the Larabee household is patriarchal, but not in the 1995 remake, in which there is no Linus Larabee, Sr.—only his widow (Nancy Marchand), the matriarch of the clan. This change also worked because Marchand, best known as Mrs. Pyncheon of the television series *Lou Grant*, excelled at playing matriarchs.

In the play and the two movie versions, it is Linus, Jr., whom Sabrina grows to love. The play, which is a comedy of manners, ends with a double revelation: Fairchild discloses that his prudent investments have made him a millionaire and his daughter an heiress; and Sabrina confesses that it is Linus, Jr., she really loves and even goes so far as to propose to him. Linus realizes his need for Sabrina, who is the embodiment of liberation, and admits his love for her.

Altering the plot so that the cynical Linus could mellow into a romantic meant eliminating Fairchild's disclosure, which, under the circumstances, would be anticlimactic. Also, Sabrina's proposing to Linus would detract from a confession of love that Linus alone can make. Wilder therefore has Sabrina, disillusioned because she thinks Linus lavished attention on her only to effect a better match for his brother, sail back to Paris. Once Linus locates the ship, in a recklessly romantic gesture, he hails a tugboat and catches up with it. In 1995, plane travel was more common, so Sabrina flies back to Paris. Since the Concorde is faster, however, Linus (who can afford the luxury) arrives there before she does. How he finds her is never really plausibly explained, but in a fairy tale all that matters is that Cinderella is reunited with Prince Charming.

Whether Sabrina sails or flies to Paris, or whether the Larabees are in shipping or media, the basic plot remained unchanged. All that was required was updating. As with any remake, the original becomes the subtext. However, with the 1954 *Sabrina*, Samuel Taylor's *Sabrina Fair* was the subtext for those who knew the play. And if anyone had seen the play with Margaret Sullavan, who created the role, it would be hard not to make comparisons between Sullavan and Hepburn, each of whom brought undeniable charm—but in different ways—to the part: Sullavan was mischievous and witty, while Hepburn was dreamy and vulnerable. For those who know Wilder's film but are unfamiliar with the play, the 1954 *Sabrina* is the subtext of the 1995 version. Moreover, in her personification of elegance, grace, and romantic longing—the very qualities we associate with a fairy-tale princess—Julia Ormond was as close to Hepburn as anyone could be.

"I've seen this before," we often say of a particular movie; quite possibly we have. Twentieth Century-Fox constantly remade its musicals: To see *Wabash Avenue* (1950) is to see *Coney Island*. *Three Blind Mice* (1938) was

set to music and became *Moon over Miami* (1941), which was remade as *Three Little Girls in Blue* (1946) and later as *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953). Often time and place were changed, but the basic plot remained the same: Raoul Walsh's *Colorado Territory* was *High Sierra* in a western setting; *I Died a Thousand Times* (1953) was *High Sierra* again, with Jack Palance in the Humphrey Bogart role. *High Society* (1965) was George Cukor's *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) with a Cole Porter score; *Against All Odds* (1984) was not only a remake of Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947) but also featured one of the stars from the original, Jane Greer. *The Preacher's Wife* (1996) was *The Bishop's Wife* (1947) from an African-American perspective. The classic *Detour*, which starred Tom Neal, was remade as a less-than-classic movie of the same name in 1992; it starred Neal's son, Tom Neal, Jr., and proved that unless filmmakers can enhance, surpass, or at least equal the original—by clarifying ambiguities or bringing out details that were only hinted at initially—they would be advised to stay with less familiar material.

#### MUSIC AND ASSOCIATIONS

Music has two main functions in a film: it either advances or enhances the narrative. When it advances the narrative, it is a plot device and is not subtextual. In Mitchell Leisen's *Lady in the Dark* (1944), a childhood song the heroine tries to remember is the key to her neurosis. Many a Twentieth Century-Fox musical included a tender ballad the heroine was belting out until the hero taught her how to sing it properly (*Coney Island*, *Wabash Avenue*). We have already seen how in many musicals working out the melody or the lyrics to a song was the significant moment in the film. There are also songs that drift in and out of the characters' lives, becoming *their* song and playing at appropriately dramatic moments; the classic example is "As Time Goes By" in *Casablanca*. Some movies have a classical score, usually a ballet or an opera, that catapults an unknown to stardom (*The Red Shoes*, 1948) or notoriety (the synthetic opera *Salammbô* in *Citizen Kane*). Sometimes a piece of music forms the film's climax, achieving an effect that words cannot: "Remember My Forgotten Man" in *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), George Gershwin's Concerto in F in *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945), the title ballet in Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris* (1951).

Music is even more functional as an element of the subtext when it does not so much advance the narrative as deepen it. Take, for example, a musical phrase that is repeatedly associated with a character, a mood, or a situation. Such a recurring musical phrase is a *leitmotif*. When a leitmotif identifies a character, it becomes the character's musical signature. Heard in conjunction with the appearance of a character, or representation of an